

Lajla Rolstad

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*:  
Undeath, Insomnia and Writing

Hovedoppgave i allmenn litteraturvitenskap

Institutt for litteratur, områdestudier og europeiske språk

Universitetet i Oslo

Høsten 2006

## **Synopsis**

The focus of this thesis is a reading of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It investigates the experience of horror and the link between horror and desire that can be found in the text. The reading centres on the vampire figure and the vampire's metaphorical function. Themes like insomnia, undeath, blood, devouring and writing are examined.

The reading of *Dracula* draws on a theoretical framework. In the discussion of horror, Julia Kristeva's and Emmanuel Levinas' phenomenological surveys of subjectivity become central. For both Kristeva and Levinas, horror signals a disturbance or crisis in subjectivity. While Levinas associates horror with the anonymity of being, Kristeva is interested in the return of maternal, abject and unrepresentable elements that haunt the edges of a certain symbolic space. Both perspectives are used in the exploration of the vampire figure and open a field where horror and desire seem linked to literary inspiration. It is this field the reading attempts to approach through the vampire metaphor.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Arne Melberg for being the ideal supervisor. He has never ceased to guide and inspire.

My warmest gratitude goes to Simon Critchley for his kindness and generosity, not only in discussing some ideas with me, but also helping me with the practical arrangements at the University of Essex, where I stayed for a year: first as an occasional student at the Department of Philosophy, then as a visiting researcher at the Centre of Theoretical Studies, in 2002-2003.

Great thanks is due to Espen Hammer, Kristin Gjesdal and Mathias, for many kinds of inspiration and support, and for opening their home in Essex to me. They have become deeply appreciated friends.

I would also like to thank Espen Hammer, Beatrice Haan-Pile and Peter Dews for allowing me to attend their lectures at the Department of Philosophy, University of Essex, during the academic year 2002-2003. Thanks to Tue, Ian, Tony, Cathy, Jonathan, Ed, James, and the other MA/doctoral students during that year. Thanks to Roman Vasseur for interesting vampiric discussions!

To Christian Refsum and Marius Wulfsberg for inspiring conversations and sound advice in the initial phases of my project, thank you. I am grateful to Bjørn Ullevoldssæter for secretarial assistance and to Ragnvald Reed and Espen Skoe, for the jokes.

A special thanks goes to Kristin Øhlckers for the many hours spent discussing horrible topics. To Liv Bjørnhaug Johansen, for her friendship and support, my love and gratitude always.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my father Øyvind Rolstad. Without his support this dissertation could not have been written.

## CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i>: A Reading.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Insomnia.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Abjection.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Kiss.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Crypt.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b><i>Dracula</i>: A Second Reading.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Literature.....</b>	<b>88</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Published in 1897 and widely read by its contemporary audience, *Dracula* is without doubt the novel its author Bram (Abraham) Stoker (1847 -1912) is best remembered for today. Few of his other works, which include *The Snake Pass* (1890) and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), are now read. Yet with *Dracula*, Stoker achieved a success which has since continued to fascinate new generations of readers.

At the end of the 19th century there was a huge interest in ghost, crime and horror stories, and the figure of the vampire was a common theme in both literature and art. While the many popular vampire stories of his time, f.ex Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampyre: or, The Feast of Blood* (1847) and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), now have been largely forgotten, Stoker's invention Count Dracula has become part of popular myth. Many film versions have been made: among them Universal's 1931 film starring Bela Lugosi, The Hammer Films *Dracula* (1958) with Christopher Lee, Herzog's *Nosferatu* (1979) and, most recently, Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). One of the things that caught my interest in *Dracula* and the vampire figure is precisely its ability to continually inspire new narratives and to constantly reproduce itself.

The central project of this thesis is a reading of Stoker's *Dracula*, which is assisted by a theoretical framework. My main object is to investigate the experience of horror,

which in the novel becomes inseparable from desire. The ambiguous relationship between the vampire and its victims, the simultaneous repulsion and desire, is a central point of interest. The vampire is connected to the return of repressed elements that both sicken and fascinate.

Reading *Dracula*, the vampire seems to function as a metaphor: it is like a blank space, a stage where the narrators' (and reader's) fear is played out. This metaphorical function is one of the factors I would like to explore in my thesis. In my reading, several elements come together in the figure of the vampire: sexuality, death, to mention a few. Yet the vampire not only signals a return of what is repressed; it in fact becomes a *prosopopeia* of elements that are somehow unrepresentable. The attempt to trace these unrepresentable aspects becomes central to my reading of the text.

To explore horror, from both an ontological and a psychoanalytical perspective, a theoretical framework has been necessary. I have worked primarily with two philosophers: Emmanuel Levinas and Julia Kristeva, focusing on Levinas' *Existence and Existents* and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. The experience of horror is for both thinkers related to a crisis of subjectivity. Somehow, it is also connected to literary writing.

In Stoker's *Dracula*, the fearful anxiety that keeps the narrators awake at night is also

what inspires them to write. Approaching horror, one seems to simultaneously approach a source of literary inspiration. In my thesis, this is something I attempt to look into.

## Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: A reading

### THE JOURNEY

On the first page of his diary, and the very first page of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker begins to record his journey into the Carpathian mountains. As a solicitor of Mr Hawkins, he is travelling to provide his services to a foreign client: the mysterious count Dracula, who lives in Eastern Europe.

“The impression I had,” he writes, recollecting the departure from Budapest, “was that we were leaving the West and entering the East” (Stoker 1993:7). His destination - the Castle Dracula - lies in the “extreme east of the country” (Stoker 1993:8), situated on the borders of several states. The region Harker travels through is more or less unknown and unmapped: “I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our Ordnance Survey maps” (Stoker 1993:8). He considers this “unmapped” area to be “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (Stoker 1993:8).

Jonathan's journey from the West to the East is not only geographically a transition from the known to the unknown. On his way to the Count's castle, Harker takes detailed notes of the breathtaking scenery and of local costume and cuisine, delighting



in the exoticism of his environment. Showing a keen interest in local folklore, he writes with a certain superior attitude that: “I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some imaginative whirlpool” (Stoker 1993:8).

Gradually, the enthusiastic interest in the exoticism of his new surroundings gives way to worry and later to dread, as Jonathan discovers that local superstition perhaps has some truth to it. There is something unsettling about the way the old lady presses him to accept a crucifix and the behaviour of the locals, who cross themselves as they look at him with expressions of pity written on their faces. His inability to understand the hushed conversations, of which he is clearly the topic, disturbs him. Quietly getting his polyglot dictionary from his bag (Stoker 1993:13), he translates the most repeated words: ““Ordog” - Satan, “pokol” - hell, “stregoica” - witch, “vrolok” and “vlkoslak” - (...) something that is either werewolf or vampire” (Stoker 1993:13).

From the beginning of the novel, then, the eastern part of Europe is described as unknown, foreign and strange, and Dracula’s residence is located in the “extreme” part (Stoker 1993:8) of this unfamiliar territory. The passage from West to East is perhaps only completed with the passage through the Borgo Pass, which opens out on the eastern side: “It seemed as though the mountain range had separated two atmospheres, and that now we had got into the thunderous one” (Stoker 1993:17). The threatening thunderclouds underline that crossing through the pass involves a

transition from a calm to a dangerous area. In fact, the castle itself seems to balance on the edge of an abyss: “The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice” (Stoker 1993:39).

## INSOMNIA AND THE JOURNAL

Harker’s journey into this previously unmapped, dangerous, extreme and borderline area is what inspires him to write his diary, and writing has to do with both pleasure and horror.

Through his voyage into the East, which he describes as an “unknown night-journey” (Stoker 1993:19), Harker begins to lead a strange nightly existence. He comes to Klausenburgh after nightfall (Stoker 1993:7) and reaches Bistritz, the post-town which is “practically on the frontier” (Stoker 1993:10), on the dark side of twilight. His journey to the castle is completed on the eve of St. George’s day, the night during which “all the evil things in the world will have full sway” (Stoker 1993:12). During his subsequent stay at the castle, Harker’s nights are spent sleepless either in the company of Dracula or anxiously writing in his diary as he begins to feel that there is something uncanny about the foreign aristocrat.

A growing sense of unease and horror marks the pages of his diary. “It may be that this strange night-existence is telling on me” (Stoker 1993:37), he remarks. Later, he feels sure of it: “I am beginning to feel this nocturnal existence tell on me. It is

destroying my nerve. I start at my own shadow, and am full of all sorts of horrible imaginings” (Stoker 1993:48). Confronted with unnatural things, like the female vampires that suddenly materialise from the moonlight (Stoker 1993:53), Jonathan begins to lose grip of what is real and not, fearing to believe the evidence of his senses. He records this development meticulously in his diary. It becomes a “nocturnal” text written during the sleepless hours of night in a foreign land. Jonathan notes: “(*Mem.* This diary seems horribly like the beginning of the “Arabian Nights,” for everything has to break off at cock-crow - or like the ghost of Hamlet’s father.)” (Stoker 1993:43/44).

Not only Jonathan’s diary, but also the other narratives in the novel - ie Mina’s, Seward’s and Lucy’s diaries, describe the sleeplessness which begins to haunt their authors. Though the narrators often seem unable to pinpoint exactly what worries them, the vaguely threatening atmosphere manifests itself in the body as restlessness and an unfamiliar sense of anxiety. As the insomnia worsens, events begin to resemble lucid yet surreal and nightmarish dreams. Writing often takes place at night: “*11 August, 3 a.m.* - Diary again. No sleep now, so I may as well write. I am too agitated to sleep” (Stoker 1993:119).

## VAMPIRIC TRACES

The other narrators travel to the East only at the end of the novel. The East, in the shape of Dracula, has instead come to them. Like an ironic inversion of Jonathan and

his early delighted sightseeing to the castle, the “heart of the enemy’s country” (Stoker 1993:455), Dracula travels, like some sort of occidental tourist, to London: the heart of the West. With his arrival in Whitby, the unknown pervades what was previously well-known and ordinary. It becomes unfamiliar, as if a slight rupture has taken place. After the vampire’s arrival, London itself becomes a strange new country. When Seward returns to Hampstead Heath at night, he can hardly recognise his surroundings (Stoker 1993:252/253).

Dracula is, as the title suggests, the central figure of Stoker’s novel. Yet he is not himself one of the narrators, and more often than not the vampire is in fact missing from the text, which, at least initially, describes everyday occurrences in the life of the narrators. Even when it seems preoccupied with other matters the text is still, as if unconsciously, centred around Dracula and reveals his proximity to the reader through apparently insignificant details.

Though the narrators themselves only on few occasions directly confront Dracula, the reader is constantly made aware of his presence through textual traces. The reader is able to guess that the vampire is in fact the cause behind the different disasters that occur: the deserted Russian ship with a dead man tied to the wheel has, we gather, carried a deadly cargo, and the fluctuations in Renfield’s lunacy, with its periodic stillness punctured by violent outbreaks, seem instigated by a mysterious influence (Stoker 1993:142).

Seward notes early how Renfield's expression "(...)" seems rather to indicate than to show something directly" (Stoker 1993:152). He later remarks that Renfield appears to be "(...)" mixed up with the Count in an indexy kind of way" (Stoker 1993:320). Such an indexical, or indirect, mode of representation is symptomatic of the text's relation to the vampire. And, indeed, when the narrators begin to examine the journals, the outbreaks in Renfield's lunacy become signifiers of the Count's comings and goings at Carfax (Stoker 1993:289). Lucy's illness is, however, perhaps the most powerful example of Dracula's invasive, yet indirect presence. When Lucy lies ashen-faced in her bed, her body itself has become a signifier pointing towards the vampire, that at this juncture is completely absent from the text.

Dracula, the central figure, is most often lacking. Though sometimes described at length, Dracula is usually traced out in a fragmented manner, only as a pallid face, red lips and eyes, teeth. In fact, the first time he is observed by Harker, the light from a lamp falls first on his red eyes and then focus solely on his mouth, revealing the white, gleaming teeth that protrude like those of a corpse when the lips shrink back. The general effect of his appearance is one of "extraordinary pallor" (Stoker 1993:28). His characteristics are those of an insomniac: pallor, prominent teeth in a drawn face, eyes reddened from staring into the darkness. This is also the description of a corpse: the open and stony eyes that stare blindly (Stoker 1993:67).

## HORROR AND DESIRE

The text thus circles around a series of metonymical figures, where a part describes the whole and thus comes to contain a compressed meaning: sharp teeth, red eyes: vampire. But also, for example, details such as the pin-pricks on Lucy's neck, the storm which drives the Russian schooner into Whitby harbour, the wolf and the giant bat which circles outside Lucy's window at night gradually seem to acquire another meaning due to the repetitive attention given them in the text. They become fetishistic objects, in the sense that they function as substitutes for the vampire itself. Through the work of these textual tropes, the reader's horror, yet also his or her narrative desire and pleasure, is redirected. The text seems to function as a fetishist screen, which at the same time points towards and protects against the vampire. In an ambiguous movement, it reveals and conceals simultaneously. The text thus appears to display the same fascinated repulsion as the vampire's victims, who are simultaneously drawn to the vampire and repelled by it.

While the vampire on the one hand is a horrifying and repulsive figure, it at the same time exerts a mysterious power of fascination and attraction over its victims. The vampiric gaze has, perhaps, a lunar quality - a gravity that both pulls at one and pushes one away. During the day, when she is awake, Lucy clutches the wreath of garlic flowers that protects her from the vampire to her breast, but as soon as night falls and she is again under its spell she throws the flowers away, baring her throat for

its bite. In encountering the vampire one seems to be drawn into a vortex of summons and repulsions.

Also the men react to the vampires with a fundamental ambiguity. When Harker encounters the female vampires in Dracula's castle, he on the one hand feels desire: "I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (Stoker 1993:53). Yet this desire is shot through with dread and repulsion. He writes that "There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. (...) There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive" (Stoker 1993:53/54). Awaiting the approach of one of the vampires, Jonathan lays quiet, "looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation" (Stoker 1993:53). And when one of them comes near he: "(...) could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood" (Stoker 1993:54).

## THE RHYTHM OF NIGHT

Sounds, and especially animal sounds, acquire an ominous meaning and recur throughout the novel as warnings of the vampire's presence. The shift from the West to the East, from the known to the unknown and from day to night is also a shift with regard to the senses: as night descends and the outline of things slowly disappears in the darkness, vision is impaired and hearing becomes the primary sense. When

Jonathan first enters the courtyard of Dracula's castle, which he forms an unclear impression of as he is not able to see it in the dark, he hears "(...) a heavy step approaching behind the great door (...). Then there was the sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts drawn back. A key was turned with the loud, grating sound of long disuse, and the great door swung back" (Stoker 1993:25).

The first night he spends in the East, Harker's sleep is disturbed by the baying of a dog. When Lucy recalls sleepwalking to the cemetery, she dreamily describes how she: "(...) heard a lot of dogs howling - the whole town seemed as if it must be full of dogs all howling at once - as I went up the steps" (Stoker 1993:130).

Indeed, a mysterious link seems to exist between Dracula and the wild beasts: "Close at hand came the howling of many wolves. It was almost as if the sound sprang up at the raising of his hand, just as the music of a great orchestra seems to leap under the baton of the conductor" (Stoker 1993:69). There is, in fact, a certain musicality in these sounds, and the baying of the beasts has a peculiar rhythm that makes Dracula express his delight: "Listen to them - the children of night. What music they make!" (Stoker 1993:29).

For Lucy, the night is filled with almost mechanical rhythms that are temporarily dispelled when Van Helsing orders Seward to stay awake in her room, watching her sleep. She writes "(...) the noises that used to frighten me out of my wits - the



flapping against the windows, the distant voices which seemed so close to me, the harsh sounds that came from I know not where and commanded me to do I know not what - have all ceased” (Stoker 1993:177).

When the men fail to guard her, the noises return. There is the “flapping and buffeting” (Stoker 1993:186) of a bat at the window, demanding entrance, then the loud and terrible beating of her mother’s heart and the strangely rhythmical sounds she hears as she lays transfixed under her mother’s body:

Somewhere near, a passing bell was tolling, the dogs all round the neighbourhood were howling (...) a nightingale was singing (...) The sounds seemed to have awakened the maids, too, for I could hear their bare feet pattering outside my door (Stoker 1993:187).

In a cacophony of noise a huge wolf throws itself against the window pane, smashing the glass in a shower of splinters.

## THE MATERNAL

The sounds are on the one hand related to the wild beasts. But through Lucy’s experience they are also linked to the maternal body. Lucy’s mother utters inarticulate noises at the moment of her death: “For a second she sat up, pointing at the wolf, and there was a strange and horrible gurgling in her throat” (Stoker 1993:186). Then she topples over, dead, weighing Lucy down with her body. The rhythms are further connected to the mother through the singing of the nightingale, which reminds Lucy of “the voice of my dead mother come back to comfort me” (Stoker 1993:187).

Yet the comfort her mother hitherto has been offering has been far from reassuring. “This poor mother, all unknowing, and all for the best as she think, does such a thing as lose her daughter body and soul” (Stoker 1993:175), sighs Van Helsing. For instance, finding their smell offensive, Mrs Westenrae removes the protective garlic flowers from her daughter’s room and opens the window, allowing the vampire to enter. As she is dying, she clutches at the wreath of garlic flowers Lucy wears around her neck and tears them away from her.

All in all, the women seem to conspire - though apparently unknowing - to assist the undead. When Van Helsing after Lucy’s death places a gold crucifix on her lips in a gesture of prohibition that he suggests could, mysteriously, block the vampire’s influence on her and allow her to really die, one of the maids steals the cross from the corpse’s mouth.

#### MASCULINE/FEMININE

In the same way as there seems to exist an opposition between East and West in the text, there is also an opposition between the sexes. This binary relation between men and women is clearly linked to the antagonism between night and day, madness and reason.

While the women - except Mina, who is described by Van Helsing as having a “man’s brain” (Stoker 1993:302) - often act irrationally to assist the vampire, the male

protagonists seem to represent rationality and law. The main narrators besides Mina (Harker and Seward) quite literally epitomize reason and lawfulness: Jonathan Harker is a solicitor and Seward is a doctor and the director of a lunatic asylum. Abraham Van Helsing embodies both these professions: “You forget,” he at one point chides his friend Seward, “that I am a lawyer as well as a doctor” (Stoker 1993:211). In addition, he is, in Seward’s words, “a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day” (Stoker 1993:147).

Curiously, Van Helsing also has “an indulgence” (Stoker 1993:270) to use the Host, thus becoming a representative of the Church as well. This “little band of men” (Stoker 1993:485), with Van Helsing as a father figure - (he at one point explicitly states that he feels like a father to Arthur (Stoker 1993:226)) - represent law, rationality and authority on all areas, including the body: especially the female body, which is investigated at length throughout the text.

If we look at the novel, we find that nearly all of the vampire’s victims are women or children. The obvious exception is the madman Renfield, who, perhaps not surprisingly, reminds Dr Seward of a child rather than a grown man (Stoker 1993:348) When Jonathan is in Dracula’s castle, Dracula gives the three female vampires a child, which he has stowed into a bag, to feed on. Lucy, after becoming a vampire, feeds on the children who play on Hampstead Heath. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the vampire’s victims are children and women rather than grown

men, who seem to prefer death to being penetrated by the vampire's fangs. The Russian sailor, when he discovers the fate of his shipmates, jumps overboard, and Jonathan leaps from a window in Dracula's castle into the river below, risking death rather than another confrontation with the vampires.

#### PENETRATION, SEXUALITY

After her initial contact with the vampire, where the white skin on her throat is punctured by its teeth, Lucy's body is repeatedly pierced and penetrated with syringes in order to receive blood transfusion from four different men. Van Helsing, after opening his own veins for her, draws the conclusion that he is now, in a sense, a "bigamist" (Stoker 1993:227), likening the transfusion of blood with a sexual union. Lucy has in fact become a "polyandrist" (Stoker 1993:227), thus compromising not only herself, but also the men who have given her blood. The only way to restore her purity seems to be through death. But Lucy's now sexualised body refuses to die.

In grim contrast to the angelic image of her "very beautiful corpse" (Stoker 1993:211) wreathed in flowers, she continues to "live" on as a vampire after her death. In undeath, she has become the "nightmare version of Lucy" (Stoker 1993:274), with her "carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity" (Stoker 1993:275). The love the men have felt for her turns to loathing and dread, mixed with sexual desire:

The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness (...) we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe. We shuddered with horror (Stoker 1993:271).

She must be reduced to a body without drives, in other words to a dead body. Van Helsing says: “I shall cut off her head and fill her mouth with garlic, and I shall drive a stake through her body” (Stoker 1993:259). The heart must also be removed (Stoker 1993:213).

Van Helsing went about his work systematically. Holding his candle so that he could read the coffin plates, and *so holding it that the sperm dropped in white patches which congealed as they touched the metal*, he made assurance of Lucy’s coffin (Stoker 1993:253) (my emphasis).

If we view the candle as a symbol of the phallus, the image of the white candle in the crypt that contains the bodies of Lucy and her mother might further suggest the conflict between a (white/pure) masculine sexuality and a feminine sexuality perceived as darker and more dangerous.

There are several violent phallic symbols in this passage. “Another search in his bag, and he took out a turnscrew” (Stoker 1993:253). With the aid of this instrument, Van Helsing then proceeds to penetrate the inner layer of the coffin: “Striking the turnscrew through the lead with a swift downward stab, which made me wince, he made a small hole, which was, however, big enough to admit the point of the saw” (Stoker 1993:254). Wrenching the lid open, Van Helsing and Seward find the coffin

to be empty.

Later they return together with Quincey and Arthur, in time to see Lucy, still dressed in the cerements of the grave, appear from the shadows. Her shining eyes are now “unclean and full of hell-fire” (Stoker 1993:271). She cradles a child in her arms, yet shocks the narrator (Seward) when: “With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone” (Stoker 1993:271). Wanting to eat the child rather than nurse it, she is no longer the ideal wife and mother. As she approaches Arthur she opens her arms wide and beckons to him: “Come to me, Arthur. (...) My arms are hungry for you” (Stoker 1993:272).

Her desire to kiss is also the desire to eat, as hunger and sexual desire now seem inseparable. The female vampires in Dracula’s castle look at Jonathan as a tempting meal: “nothing can be more dreadful than those awful women, who were – who *are* – waiting to suck my blood” (Stoker 1993:57). Neither the female vampires’ nor Lucy’s hunger is to be satiated, however.

Instead of being penetrated by Lucy’s fangs, Arthur penetrates her body with a stake in a passage with obvious sexual overtones:

Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white

flesh. Then he struck with all his might.

The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, bloodcurdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it (Stoker 1993:277).

Rather perversely, the night of Lucy's staking, 29<sup>th</sup> September, would have been the first day of her marriage to Arthur (Stoker 1993:141/262), thus further emphasising that the act of penetrating the vampire's body with a stake amounts to a sexual union.

In fact, the men's fierce resistance and appalled horror of being bitten by the vampire has been interpreted as a phobia for the homosexual.<sup>1</sup> There are certainly erotic undertones to the vampire's bite, the act of penetrating its victims' skin in order to draw blood. It has a powerful influence on the women's bodies, which become places of desire and drives and must be subjected to strict control. Van Helsing shocks the little group of men when he refuses Arthus to kiss the dying Lucy on the mouth, but instead holds him back. Not until Lucy's anger at this intervention dissipates, does he allow Arthur to kiss her on the forehead, and then "only once" (Stoker 1993:209).

In the same way as the stake clearly works as a sexual symbol, the sharp, long teeth, repeatedly described in the text, seem to acquire a phallic function. Even the syringe becomes a phallic instrument, as is shown through the sexualisation of Lucy's transfusions. Several sharp instruments return repeatedly in the text and draw blood:

---

<sup>1</sup> See f.ex Maurice Hindle's "Introduction" (Stoker 1993:vii-xxx)

the stake, the syringe, the teeth. Yet we must not forget the pen which records these different operations. Stabbing, piercing and writing are activities which may be lethal, but are also performed in order to save lives. It is the pen rather than the stake which in fact is the primary weapon against the vampire.

## WRITING

The pages of the diary seem to hold some of the power of the crucifix, the garlic, the wild rose and the mountain ash (Stoker 1993:41). The narrators still harbour the, perhaps naïve, hope that writing can somehow function therapeutically, and writing when in an agitated state is experienced as calming. “I am anxious, and it soothes me to express myself here; it is like whispering to one’s self and listening at the same time” (Stoker 1993:96/97), Mina remarks. Overwhelmed by events, Jonathan notes that: “ (...) now, feeling as though my own brain was unhinged or as if the shock had come which must end in its undoing, I turn to my diary for repose. The habit of entering accurately must help to soothe me” (Stoker 1993:36). And a night he has denied himself the relief of chloral, “the modern Morpheus” (Stoker 1993:134), Dr Seward writes that “I was too excited to sleep, but this diary has quieted me, and I feel I shall get some sleep tonight” (Stoker 1993:136).

In addition to the therapeutic effect, writing has a more practical aim. The project which in fact motivates the writing of the novel is the narrators’ joint effort to collate material and to arrange the scattered fragments of diaries, newspaper cuttings,



invoices and other texts into a more or less coherent narrative. Especially Jonathan and Mina are “hard at it” (Stoker 1993:289), working with the different records. “Harker has gone back, and is again collating his material. He says that by dinner-time they will be able to show a whole connected narrative” (Stoker 1993:289). The narrators hope that this will disclose something of Dracula’s plans and reveal the location of the vampire’s sanctuary. The desire to write is in this view linked to the desire to find and kill the vampire. Through establishing a chronology of events, the narrators hope to finally defeat their enemy.

“What a good thing that Mrs Harker put my cylinder into type! We never could have found the dates otherwise...” (Stoker 1993:289), Seward comments after seeing Mina’s transcription of his phonographic records. The preoccupation with dates and details expressed by the narrators is motivated by the desire to arrange events into a narratological pattern. Transcripts of the journals are circulated within the group. Such an attitude relies on the belief that they still occupy a realm where events can be meaningfully recorded and thus in a sense controlled. The wish to keep an exact record of events is repeatedly stated by the different narrators. Yet do they not seem to have crossed into a territory where events are no longer certain or stable, or follow a “normal” chronology? Where they can no longer trust the evidence of their own senses or their sanity? The lunatic Renfield’s habit of recording his zoophagous project and his notebook with its neat columns of numbers that are added together meaninglessly somehow ridicules the detailed diaries kept by the narrators of the

novel.

The repetitive insistence on taking detailed notes seems in this view rather to be caused by trauma than to serve a primarily rational purpose, and the preoccupation with logic, chronology and order, though in one sense helpful, bears witness to shock and obsession. In sitting down to write what becomes obvious is one's obsession with and inability to write of anything but the vampire. There lies, then, a fundamental ambiguity at the heart of the novel: writing becomes both a weapon against the vampire and an expression of damage, the trauma of the narrators that hopelessly attempt to make sense of a world suddenly become absurd, fallen into darkness.

While writing on the one hand is an exploration of the unknown, nocturnal spaces that suddenly open around those who write, it also marks the refusal to explore: the desperate desire to leave Dracula's castle, the frantic search for the boxes of earth in order to sterilize them. In other words, writing seems to become the simultaneous crossing and demarcation of borders. It is both active and passive/reactive praxis.

In this view, the fundamental ambiguity of the novel – ie the desire and horror that simultaneously attracts and repulses the vampire's victims - seems to be expressed in the very act of writing itself.

## GOOD AND/OR EVIL

The vampire is clearly a figure of evil, and Stoker even lets the Count purchase one of

his houses in London under the name “Count De Ville” (Stoker 1993:352). Yet through Mina’s and Lucy’s descriptions Dracula occasionally becomes confused with a power for good. As Lucy lays dying she observes how: “(...) a whole myriad of little specks seemed to come blowing in through the broken window, and wheeling and circling around like the pillar of dust that travellers describe when there is a simoom in the desert” (Stoker 1993:186). The simoom is a deadly, suffocating sandstorm and seems an appropriate metaphor for the vampire’s intrusion into her room. However, the association of the “pillar of dust” with the lethal sandstorm is disturbed when Mina later writes about the mist that seeps into her bedroom through the joinings of the door that:

It got thicker and thicker, till it seemed as if it became concentrated into a sort of pillar of cloud in the room, through the top of which I could see the light of the gas shining like a red eye. Things began to whirl through my brain just as the cloudy column was now whirling in the room, and through it all came the scriptural words “a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.” Was it indeed some such spiritual guidance that was coming to me in my sleep? (Stoker 1993:333).

She is clearly thinking of the divine pillar which guides the israelites through the desert, leading them to the promised land. And, indeed, Lucy confuses the vampire’s red eyes with the red light that is reflected from the windows of St Mary Church in Whitby at sunset (Stoker 1993:125).

Not only the ability to bestow eternal “life” to a chosen few, but also his other powers: over the weather and the wild beasts, his superhuman strength and ability to

change shape etc throws a strangely religious light on Dracula. In Renfield's eyes at least, Dracula is a messianic figure, and Renfield behaves as his disciple: "I am here to do Your bidding, Master. I am Your slave, and You will reward me, for I shall be faithful" (Stoker 1993:135). The Count occasionally functions like an inversion of Christ, a strangely distorted mirror image of the Messiah who offers "salvation" from death to his victims.

Indeed, the reward Renfield hopes for is eternal life. Beginning to get a rudimentary grasp of his favourite lunatic's ideas, Seward notes that: "I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac; what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can" (Stoker 1993:95). Hoping in this way to prolong his own life, Renfield sets out to achieve his goal in an accumulative way, "multiplying" the number of lives that are available to him: flies, spiders that eat the flies, sparrows that eat the spiders... Quietly sitting in his room one day, the sparrows gone from his window sill, he is suddenly violently sick, disgorging "a whole lot of feathers" (Stoker 1993:95).

Like in Lucy's operations, the medium that transfers life between different individuals is blood: attempting to cut Seward with a dinner-knife and managing to slash his wrist, Renfield drops to his knees on the floor and licks at the blood (Stoker 1993:184). As he is being led away by the attendants, he repeats over and over: "The blood is the life! The blood is the life!" (Stoker 1993:184). This episode occurs

between Lucy's third and fourth transfusion, at a point where the novel centres around the movement of blood in and out of her veins. Her whole body is like a container that is constantly being filled and emptied, as if it is a heart beating slowly, stertorously.

## DEATH

In the text, there is an ambiguity concerning death that is revealed in an almost exemplary manner if we look at Whitby cemetery. During the daytime, the cemetery is a favourite spot for a picnic, a beautiful place where Lucy and Mina chat with the old fishermen about the weather and the people that are buried there. The death that surfaces in their conversation is a commonplace topic, almost a cliché, especially as the young women picture it.

There is the romantic idea of dignified, noble and beautiful, sorrowful death, which can be faced courageously. Or death as escape from an intolerable situation: when the Russian sailor discovers who is responsible for the sailors disappearing, he writes in his log that it is "better to die like a man" (Stoker 1993:114). Jonathan pictures the same end for himself as he contemplates leaping from the window of his room in Dracula's castle, hurtling towards the cliffs below: "At the foot of it a man may sleep - as a man" (Stoker 1993:73). To die like a man rather than to die like...? What precisely...? The possibility of death as peaceful sleep, or as the heroic leap into the void: becoming "God's true dead" (Stoker 1993:279). Quincey's death at the very end of the novel: "And, to our bitter grief, with a smile and in silence, he died, a gallant

gentleman” (Stoker 1993:485).

Talking about death and the dead, old Swales, whom the young women meet in the cemetery, shocks his feminine audience. He easily punctures their romantic fantasies of noble death by telling the truth behind the censored memorial texts on the gravestones. Whitby cemetery is in fact a fundamentally different place than the idyllic fantasy of these young women, and at night it becomes a dangerous area. It is to the precise spot where she picnics during the day that Lucy is drawn by Dracula’s hypnotic call and is drained of her blood, her body bent backwards and fondled. It is here Swales’ body is found crumpled in a heap, with the spine snapped and his face frozen in a twisted expression of horror.

Thinking of this face, Mina writes: “Perhaps he had seen Death with his dying eyes!” (Stoker 1993:116). The reader, knowing at this stage more than the narrator, understands that Swales must have met the vampire, which now figures as the personification of death: such a different death from the one so easily discussed. The death personified by the vampire seems to disturb the idea of death as peaceful withdrawal or as something one can somehow achieve, death as escape from intolerable existence.

With the arrival of the vampire, death, instead of being perceived as the ultimate freedom - from one’s body, from earthly desire - becomes bondage. When Lucy’s

body lies sprawled on the bed, even the drawing of breath has become painful; she is dying from not dying. More and more, her appearance begins to resemble that of a corpse; one that still walks among the living, grotesquely reminding them of their own mortality. Her face is now “ghastly, chalkily pale; the red seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently; her breathing was painful to see or hear” (Stoker 1993:158). Before her second transfusion she is “in a swoon (...) more horribly white and wan-looking than ever. Even the lips were white, and the gums seemed to have shrunk back from the teeth, as we sometimes see in a corpse after a prolonged illness” (Stoker 1993:167). Instead of gradually becoming more detached from her body, she is absorbed by pain and desire. And there is nothing of any peaceful acceptance of the inevitable in the attitude of the men, who strive to keep her alive at all costs. In undeath, there is only the suffering and desiring body bound to its coffin, to earth and blood, for ever. Death does not sweep one away from the worries of this world to a blissful afterlife, but only nails one tighter to the world, to one’s body, which now is changing... incessantly craving, never satisfied.

## VISION

The suggestion that Swales might have actually seen the face of death, which the reader understands to be Dracula’s face, introduces the question of visibility into the text, a theme that returns in the novel in connection with the figure of the vampire. Can the vampire really be seen? There is the scene with the mirror in Dracula’s castle,

where Jonathan, looking into the glass after having shaved, discovers that there is no reflection of Dracula in it: “The whole room behind me was displayed; but there was no sign of a man in it, except myself” (Stoker 1993:38).

The vampire is missing from the mirror, just as it is often missing from the text. The text plays with the theme of visibility and withdrawal, drawing our attention to the absence which conceals itself behind the figure of the vampire. The different crypts that are explored by the narrators are usually empty. There is Jonathan’s hazardous climb from his window, balancing on the narrow stone ledge to finally leap into the Count’s room, which he finds, to his surprise, to be empty (Stoker 1993:66). Upon opening Lucy’s coffin, Van Helsing and Seward find that it is empty (Stoker 1993:254). In Carfax they find “nothing throughout except dust” (Stoker 1993:325), and Dracula’s tomb, in the bowels of the castle, is empty:

There was one great tomb more lordly than all the rest: huge it was, and nobly proportioned. On it was but one word,

#### DRACULA

This then was the Un-Dead home of the King-Vampire, to whom so many more were due. Its emptiness spoke eloquent to make certain what I knew. (...) I laid in Dracula’s tomb some of the Wafer, and so banished him from it, Un-Dead, for ever (Stoker 1993:476).

The name on the tomb with the blankness surrounding it reminds the reader of the title page of the novel - DRACULA. Perhaps the novel itself, then, is some sort of crypt or tomb, centred around an absence? Yet what does it mean to ask this question?



The search for the undead, threatening and nocturnal force that in fact motivates the novel and produces writing, in a sense fails at the same time as it succeeds - in being hunted down at last, the vampire crumbles to dust before the gaze of the beholder. And at this moment, the text itself naturally comes to an end.

If, as Mina's remark implies, the vampire personifies death, can death truly be seen? Does the disappearance of the vampire convey something about our relationship with death? While we are still living, we can have no direct contact with death, but must relate to death through a representation, a visual or verbal image. And yet this representation can not be the representation of a presence, of any graspable object - any representation of death can only *misrepresent*, cover or represent an absence.<sup>2</sup> If the vampire is death personified, does not the face of the vampire cover such an absence?

Is the face of the vampire really a death mask? Dracula is likened to a statue (Stoker 1993:25), and his face is described as a "waxen image" (Stoker 1993:484). When encountering Lucy in her tomb, Seward notes that "the lovely, blood-stained mouth grew to an open square, *as in the passion masks of the Greeks and Japanese. If ever a face meant death (...) we saw it at that moment*" (Stoker 1993:272) (my emphasis).

---

<sup>2</sup> "The paradox at the heart of the representation of death is perhaps best conveyed by the figure of prosopopeia, that is, the rhetorical trope by which an absent or imaginary person is presented as speaking or acting. Etymologically, prosopopeia means to make a face (*prosopon* + *poien*); in this sense we might think of a death mask or *memento mori*, a form which indicates the failure of presence, a face which withdraws behind the form which presents it" (Critchley 1997:73).

At the end of the search for the vampire, when they open the wooden box where it is concealed, the narrators catch a glimpse of an emerging face that, though still closed in and sealed like a waxen image, is on the verge of opening: “As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph” (Stoker 1993:484). This is the instant between night and day where the undead is about to unfold in its full power, the eyes widening. But in this instant must come the sweep and flash of Jonathan’s great knife, shearing through the throat, whilst at the same time Quincey’s bowie knife is plunged into the heart. The nocturnal essence dissolves before it can be touched. It withdraws from sight: “It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight” (Stoker 1993:484).

The vampire is linked to a visibility that, throughout the novel, slowly begins to fade. We find that, with its mask-like face, the vampire becomes a *prosopopeia* concealing an absence, a failed representation of a night that withdraws. But is this simply the unrepresentability of death? Or is it not rather the case that several strands come together in the figure of the vampire: undeath, insomnia, blood, femininity, night, writing, desire and horror? And that the vampire points towards and becomes a metaphor, though perhaps a failed one, for something that, somehow, refuses to be drawn into the light of day, but withdraws from sight.

# Insomnia

*When I am on the worldly plane, which I share with things and beings, being is profoundly hidden.*

- Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*

So... building on some ideas from our first reading of *Dracula*, the vampire's contorted face seems to be a mask of some kind, a condensation of elusive elements. The text itself functions as a fetishistic screen, that directs the reader's fear and attention towards this object or other objects that replace it (bats, pin-pricks). Yet what, if anything, lies behind this mask/screen, these objects of horror?

I would like to approach an understanding of horror through the works of Emmanuel Levinas and Julia Kristeva, more precisely through Levinas' *Existence and Existents* and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. To draw on their psychoanalytical and phenomenological approaches might be a fruitful way to explore horror, to figure out why horror and desire are somehow connected, and to understand more of those ambiguous elements which have been suppressed, rejected, yet are somehow (at least metaphorically) represented by the vampire. Tracing metaphors like night, darkness etc in Levinas' and Kristeva's discussions of horror might lead us to an understanding of what is at stake here: from where the horror emanates. Of special interest here are Kristeva's investigation into what she calls "abjection" and Levinas' thought-experiment around "*il y a*." It would seem that the discussions of abjection and the *il y a* are attempts at describing an experience (though "experience" is actually a

misguiding term in this context) of what one can call *night*, a dark place where objects seem to disappear... As we will see, It is something (a Thing, not an object) that apparently falls "outside" of the symbolic realm in which the subject resides - the realm of daylight and clear vision.

In the works we are here focusing on, Levinas' *Existence and Existents* and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, both Levinas and Kristeva provide – despite their marked differences – phenomenological investigations of an “outside,” writing at the limit of what can be said, and end up with the effort to gesture towards something which is in fact beyond the reach of phenomenology.

### *IL Y A*

Levinas published this slim book, *De l'existence a l'existant*, in 1947. In many ways, it can be read as a response to Heidegger's thinking, which Levinas was introduced to as a student in the 1920s. Heidegger's masterpiece *Sein und Zeit* looms in the background of the text, where Levinas explores “being,” or “existence,” in a manner which is both deeply influenced by and critical towards Heidegger.

Rather than describing being only as the being of a Being (which is Heidegger's way), Levinas wishes to explore being without beings, so to speak. He begins with a thought-experiment: “Let us imagine all beings, things and persons reverting to nothingness” (Levinas 1988:51). Imagine that the world disappears, that all the

objects in the world disappear. What, then, remains? Nothing? Levinas' claim is that this nothingness would itself be felt like some kind of presence: a certain atmospheric pressure, a murmur in the void. "Something would happen, if only night and the silence of nothingness" (Levinas 1988:52). Levinas compares this anonymous happening, the sense of presence that returns in the absence of the void, with the third person impersonal pronoun that designates an action that somehow has no author, like "it rains": "il pleut". He calls it *il y a*. The *il y a* is "being in general" (Levinas 1988:52).

Levinas proceeds to explain the *il y a* phenomenologically as the very experience of the night. This is not the night where one sleeps, but rather the night of insomnia, where one is unable to rest. The night of infinite passivity, where one is simply too weak, too tired to sleep, too tired to die. According to Levinas the fundamental atmosphere of this night is sheer dread or horror, being riveted to existence without an exit. The insomniac body that twists relentlessly, sick with exhaustion, unable to find repose. So, if we want to explore the nature of horror, this is a good place to start: With the insomnia that begins to haunt the narrators of the novel, the exhausting, nightly vigilance. With Lucy's body sprawled on the bed, the drawing of breath become painful, while she is slowly turning into a vampire.

What does it mean, in Levinas' terms, to say that the world disappears? More precisely, what does he mean by "world"? For Levinas, the world in fact has a

positive function because being in general, which he understands to be the anonymity of the *il y a*, is horrible and unthinkable. The world erupts from this being, this formless darkness, and stands “between” the I and “It.” It is the circuit of a consciousness that has extracted itself from anonymous being: a being, a subject, which exists through its absorption in the world .

In the world, he writes, I deal with things, with objects (Levinas 1988:27). In other words, the world involves a relation between an I - a subject - and objects: it is in fact the event where a subject appears and with it form, ie objects. Being in the world is characterised by a joyous appetite for things (Levinas 1988:27).

In the world, according to Levinas, there is a perfect correspondence between intention - which must here be understood not in any uncorporeal sense but rather “with the sting of desire that animates it” (Levinas 1988:28) - and the object of that intention: “In desiring I am (...) absorbed with the desirable, with an object that will completely slake my desire” (Levinas 1988:28). The example Levinas gives of this correspondence is food. To eat when I am hungry sates that hunger - in other words, the meal perfectly corresponds with my hunger. To eat is also to be absorbed by eating: when I am eating, I am not concerned with anything else. I do not really eat for the sake of existing, Levinas says; I eat because I am hungry.

Let us take some time to look at the example of food; it is significant for us because of the place it occupies in everyday life, but especially because of the relationship between desire and its

satisfaction which it represents, and which constitutes what is typical of life in the world. What characterizes this relationship is a complete correspondence between desire and its satisfaction. Desire knows perfectly well what it wants. And food makes possible the full realization of its intention. At some point, everything is consummated (Levinas 1988:35).

It is not by accident that food becomes an example that illustrates the relationship between subject and object in the world. On the contrary, digestion seems to represent the mode of being in the world, where I devour and digest not only objects but others, who are like objects to me. “The other is indeed not treated like a thing, but is never separated from things” (Levinas 1988:30). The other is an object already through his or her clothing, says Levinas. Even the naked body of the other remains clothed by form. In the world, there can be no true nakedness: “What does not enter into the forms is banished from the world” (Levinas 1988:31). There is nothing Other, only the self, the same, my desire and things I desire. My absorption in this circle is my absorption in the world.

There is no “outside” to this circle. Things might come to me from an exterior, but it is an exteriority that is already directed at an interiority: in other words, the outside corresponds with the inside. That what we experience as exterior to us is already adjusted to and refers to what is interior is due to the intentionality or sense of the subject (Levinas 1988:40). To explain what he means by this, Levinas uses metaphors like “luminosity,” “vision” and “light” (Levinas 1988:40). It is this light that turns objects into a world, that makes them belong to us (Levinas 1988:40) and this is why

sight is the pre-eminent sense (Levinas 1988:41) The object is given to me through its form, which allows me to grasp it: "The form wedded to an object delivers that object over to us" (Levinas 1988:38). "A form is that by which a thing shows itself and is graspable" (Levinas 1988:39). The form that allows me to grasp an object also has to do with light: form is that by which a being is "turned toward the sun" (Levinas 1988:31). What is described through these terms is that the world is the field of a consciousness, and that the structure of this consciousness is a closed circle (Levinas 1988:36).

The world, then, seems to be a brilliantly illuminated place where all things are visible and, in their visibility, graspable. There seems to be no hidden places, no folds or secrets, only clean and shining surfaces wherein I can see my own face reflected back to me like in a mirror.

At the beginning of the novel, the character of Lucy is such an illuminated surface. As potential wife, she is simply another piece of property, transparent in her purity - and I am thinking here of Bram Dijkstra and his discussion of the theme of woman as imitation, as a reflection of man, that seems to be a commonplace in *fin-de-siecle* art and literature (Dijkstra 1988), where women are surrounded by mirrors and confined by polished circular structures that also reflect their surroundings: water basins and ponds, the full moon, the orbs of the eyes wherein her lover can see only himself. In other words, where what is seen by the eyes that desire is the object that would



perfectly correspond to that desire, and therefore would – if one could only obtain it - satisfy it, giving it pause and creating a perfect balance within the self that feels no unfulfilled need, no lack, no hunger.

Yet throughout the novel, the “object” of desire – Lucy – begins to slip away. Her transformation also means that the circular and “perfect” exchange of desire and satisfaction is disturbed. The satisfaction of desire, the promised union, never takes place. Her lovers are turned down one by one, and she dies before her wedding with Arthur. She is transforming into an elusive figure that cannot be held or “devoured,” but instead threatens to devour the ones who desire in a bloodsucking kiss.

Levinas contrasts the economic structure expressed by food with the kiss:

Compare eating with loving, which occurs beyond economic activity and the world. For what characterizes love is an essential and insatiable hunger. (...)The trouble one feels before the beloved does not only precede what we call, in economic terms, possession, but is felt in the possession too. In the random agitation of caresses there is the admission that access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused. There is also the ridiculous and tragic simulation of devouring in kissing and love-bites. It is as though one has made a mistake about the nature of one's desire and had confused it with hunger which aims at something, but which one later found out was a hunger for nothing. The *other* is precisely this objectless dimension (Levinas 1988:35).

A disturbance is taking place, and the “perfect” correspondence between object and desire begins to slip. In one's desire for the other, the “object” is no longer graspable.

## LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Sunshine and nightfall – phenomena of the world, to be sure, but also metaphors and symbolic constellations, in *Dracula* as in Levinas' text. Light and darkness has to do with what I can see and what I cannot see, obviously. With what I can think and what is unthinkable. Seeing and thinking gives me control over what is "exterior," the objects in the world, which fit into forms that I can see or grasp.

The narrators of *Dracula* struggle to understand, see and control the threatening element that is invading their world. The loss of control is connected to the loss of sight; in the dark hours of night, vision is impaired, and what they see becomes fragmented, surreal, dreadful. What was formerly thought impossible is actually taking place in front of their eyes, as if this half-vision is hallucinatory, and doubts concerning the senses arise. A foreign aristocrat climbs face down a smooth wall, lizard-style, using his toes and fingers in an uncivilized way. The dead walk the earth. If anyone gets bitten, maybe they're not going to heaven. Life is definitely not a tea party anymore, and knowing the railway timetables by heart is not helping. How very upsetting.

"It," "the Thing," "monster," "terrible Being;" the vampire is called by many names. The world of Mr and Mrs Harker and their friends was moving right on track before "It" arrived, disturbing the order of life, and death. Even what should be natural and easy habits, like eating and sleeping, become almost impossible tasks, and the body is

changing in ways it should not. Confronting this other upsets the duality of light and darkness, life and death, a separation that defines the borders of the world as they know it.

These borders, the protective barriers of the world which keep the horror at bay, are throughout the novel proven to be fragile and unstable. During the day, Whitby cemetery is a lovely spot for a picnic, where Mina and Lucy socialise with the old fishermen and chat about the weather or who is buried there. Yet as soon as the light fades after sunset, it becomes a fundamentally different place. Here, Lucy surrenders to the vampire's embrace, hypnotised by his red eyes. Old Swales is found here one morning, dead, with his spine snapped and a frozen expression of horror in his face.

Even places that one has thought "safe," where the routine of ordinary life has been running smoothly, can be "invaded." The intimacy of the home, the bed-room, yes, even the haven of one's own dreams becomes a dangerous area, where one can fall victim to hypnotic influences. There is no place to hide, no "inside" where one can withdraw. Either "It" is already there, or, in Renfield's words: "It is coming – coming – coming!" (Stoker 1993:136).

Something that is not an object or a name returns through the cracks in the world, something unnameable, like a dense materiality that is "thick, coarse, massive, wretched" (Levinas 1988:51) and which Levinas associates with the *il y a*. It is like

the materiality of a corpse that no longer signifies anything and is not an object, but rather a body that has fallen out of the world. Haunting, coming towards one in a strange return that unsettles and threatens, things are exterior in a way that no longer relates to the inwardness of an I, but is foreign to me. It is as if I, in losing myself, have lost my ability to withdraw into my inwardness and have become one who no longer has an inside but is wrenched violently open or pulled inside out like a glove, painfully exposed. “Behind the luminosity of forms, by which beings already relate to our “inside,” matter is the very fact of the *there is (il y a)* ...” (Levinas 1988:51). Something that returns... An occidental tourist wandering the streets of London, a walking corpse who haunts the living; a body without a soul, returning from the grave.

## THE WORK OF ART

Levinas writes that because things in the world are given to us through form, because they relate to an inwardness and belong to a subject, their otherness is hardly noticeable. Yet, he claims, through art, things are removed from the world and stand out in their alterity. Art interposes a distance between me and the “object” and allows it to stand forth in its strangeness. This somehow affects me as a dimming of lights. I can no longer grasp the object as familiar, as something I possess. The thing is removed from the perspective of the world, from the structure where my desire for it would perfectly correspond with it, and devouring fails. Levinas calls the distance that in art somehow seeps in between me and the thing “exoticism.” “Exoticism modifies

the contemplation itself” (Levinas 1988:46), he writes. “The “objects” are outside, but this outside does not relate to an “interior;” they are not already naturally “possessed” (Levinas 1988:46). Art works are “objects” that are no longer given to me, and because of this strangeness, the world begins to fade.

Night is falling, and the objects slowly disappear in the darkness. In the emerging blackness, Lucy’s transparent body slowly becomes opaque, dense, a corporeality without form - no longer an object to be possessed, no longer clean and proper. She dissolves into a swarming of points that lacks perspective, but exerts a hypnotising influence on those who, staring blindly in disbelief, watch her recede into the night. “We all looked on in horrified amazement as we saw (...) the woman, with a corporeal body as real at the moment as our own, pass in through the interstice where scarce a knife-blade could have gone” (Stoker 1988:273).

Her face now resembles an exotic “passion mask” (Stoker 1988:272) or perhaps rather a death mask: “if ever a face meant death (...) we saw it at that moment” (Stoker 1988:272). On the verge of shedding her form, she is becoming naked with the nakedness that hides itself behind the death mask of the face, a disturbing, impossible nakedness that cannot be seen. At this moment, Lucy is, perhaps, in a mystical fashion turning into an art work: a dark text, written with dread-filled desire. Like an art work she is, with the absence of forms, falling out of the world.

In art, things withdraw from me and tremble in a certain nakedness, “that real nakedness which is not the absence of clothing, but (...) *the absence of forms*” (Levinas 1988: 46) (my emphasis). Levinas uses sound as an example. In a poetic text, sound is no longer the noise of an object, but a musicality that no longer primarily signifies. The “object” or word seems to thicken and stand forth as sensation, and in this withdrawal from meaning *art moves towards the things as they are in themselves*, instead of how they appear in their belongingness to a world: art thus approaches “*reality as it is in itself, after the world has come to an end*” (Levinas 1988:50) (my emphasis). Detached from the object reference, sensation begins to stray: “and it is this wandering about in sensation, in *aisthesis*, that produces the aesthetic effect” (Levinas 1988:47). Wandering; which in the novel produces writing. Journeys, journals...

Again: metaphors like light and darkness, vision and hallucination. There is a “struggle with sight” (Levinas 1988:50) as if I in approaching or being approached by the nakedness of the particular am pulverised by an unknown other that forces me to give up my possession of it or even my possession of self - being no longer the master of oneself or this other, one is put under a tremendous pressure. Fissures appear in the continuity of a world suddenly fallen into darkness, where “things break away and are cast toward us like chunks that have weight in themselves” (Levinas 1988:51).

With the disappearance of the world that somehow seems to take place in art, what

one finds in one's sudden exposure to it is the other night, the night of insomnia, where *I* am no longer... where I am ground to pieces by the oppressive, stifling blackness that emerges. In this night, which is the *il y a*, one is enthralled to being and no longer possesses the freedom to withdraw, but is riveted to brute and wretched matter, to the decaying body that is already cadaverous, smelling of earth and blood. This is precisely the experience of undeath, where one is no longer an "I" but an "it" condemned to inhabit a dead body for all eternity, a wretched being bound to existence, to earth, blood, one's coffin, with no hope of death. *This third person is myself become no one.* There is no "*I*" when *It* is. It is anonymous. It is impersonal. This realisation, says Levinas, would be horror. Therefore, rejoice that the world protects us.

Yet, and this is interesting: as seen in the discussion of the world, the otherness of the other, the otherness of the art work and the otherness of the *il y a* somehow become confused in Levinas' argument. The "real" nakedness of the other – beyond forms, beyond the position of "object" - also becomes the nakedness of the art work that leads us towards the *il y a*. In fact, in an alternative reading of Levinas that would draw out the significance of the *il y a* in his works, Simon Critchley suggests that the experience of transcendence that the face of the other opens unto in Levinas' writings might not lead one to any religious experience or trace of god, but rather to the impersonal trauma of the *il y a* - the absence of god, an atheist transcendence (Critchley 1997:80-83). In other words, both art and the other person can become

openings to this “experience” of being, which transcends our everyday world. So while the *il y a* is connected to horror, it also touches my desire, because it hides behind the face of the one I love.

Of course, even though art somehow approaches the *il y a* there can be no direct experience of it, of the total disappearance of the world, because without a world there is no I. The otherness of the *il y a*, as well as the otherness of the other, rather *signals itself through disturbance*; when the world suddenly becomes foreign, as can happen when I return to the city after a long absence and find it imperceptibly changed and unfamiliar. It signals itself through anxiety, which is not fear of a specific thing or event, but a dread that cannot be placed, emanating from a place outside (or within), or through my excessive desire for something that I don’t know what is, an uneasy, despairing desire that seems to reach no terminus.



## Abjection

While Levinas' project is ontological, in *Powers of Horror* Kristeva investigates the basic processes that shape the human mind. She wishes to uncover the foundation of subjectivity, and the experience of horror in fact becomes essential to her argument.

It is in search of the universal mechanism of subjectivity Kristeva introduces what she calls "abjection." To do justice to Kristeva's often complex discussion, it is necessary to understand abjection in its whole array of meanings, both in the sense of "being in a more servile subjection than a subject," of "being worthless and base," and, crucially, as "the act of casting forth or throwing down or away," a forcible expulsion (Macdonald (ed.) 1977:3). The abject must then be understood in a similar fashion as not only an outcast or what is worthless and base, but what is repelled or rejected, abjected.

Kristeva writes that the most archaic and elementary form of abjection might be food loathing (Kristeva 1982:2), a violent, convulsive rejection of elements that sicken me. Her example is the nausea that takes hold of me when I am offered milk from my parents and reject it. Nausea is in fact central to the experience of horror described in *Dracula*. The smell in Carfax and other places where the vampire sleeps is sickening. Renfield, attempting to consume more "life" than he should in imitation of the vampire, disgorges a mass of feathers (Stoker 1993:95). A "horrible feeling of

nausea” (Stoker 1993:29) grips Jonathan when he is touched by the Count, and nausea takes Mina when her head is pressed to the bleeding cut in Dracula’s chest. Why is this intimacy so repulsive?

Abjection has to do with the emergence of subjectivity as Kristeva pictures it. The nausea she describes is related to the springing forth of an *I*: “During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (Kristeva 1982:3). The vomiting that shakes me is the “shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system” (Kristeva 1982:3). In other words, I vomit or abject to become myself, to be inscribed in the symbolic. A subject emerges, then, through a process of separation and differentiation that, *already at work within the body*, is now repeated on a symbolic level. This separation that earlier has had to do with bodily processes such as anality, and with the primary processes (ie the distribution of drive energy in the body), now involves setting myself apart from other objects and arranging my image of myself and of those objects in “a space that becomes symbolic because it connects the two separated positions, recording them or redistributing them in an open combinatorial system” (Kristeva 1984:43).

In other words, the separation through which I become introduces the distinction between subject and object, that seem to establish each other in a chiasmic manner. Such a chiasmic model is, however, not completely accurate.

To put it more concretely, the separation in question involves a tearing apart of the mother-child monad. While the mother was once the object of desire *par excellence* - or, rather, its pre-object, as at this pre-symbolic stage the subject-object distinction has not yet been introduced - the intimacy of the mother-child relationship soon becomes suffocating for the child who must separate from the mother with the advent of subjectivity. The ensuing struggle is a violent one, and the mother now becomes a threatening figure, striking the subject with the fear of being unable to break from the womb, instead being enclosed by it, stifled, dying, rotting - turning it into a tomb. And thus the spasms and vomiting, my refusal of the milk she offers me, serve to protect me, to separate me from her. The nature of the break with the maternal helps explain the ambivalence that Kristeva claims is now aroused by it - simultaneous repulsion and attraction.

During the struggle with the mother, Kristeva writes, the child must identify with the father in order to break free. It is through the paternal function the child enters the symbolic universe of signification. Rather than operating with a chiasmic model, then, the configuration that is described in Kristeva's text is that of an Oedipal triangle, where my mother becomes the object of my desire and, in my wish to replace him, I identify with my father. One might say that with the entry into the symbolic, the mother becomes the first object.

So, what Kristeva is describing is a process of separation through which identity is created. This process of differentiation excludes filth from the “own and proper” body. It creates an outside that allows me to separate from what I do not accept, death, for instance. In *Dracula*, identity is established in a similar way. The “home” is separated from the “unknown,” West from East, good from evil, feminine “purity” from feminine sexuality, to mention a few examples. Yet these clear distinctions are somehow threatened. How to draw a sharp line between life and death, for instance, when the undead refuses to respect such borders?

The vampire signals the return of something which is not an object, and which threatens to invade identity and the clean and proper, which I have separated from what is perceived as “other.” The *abject* is precisely not an object:

The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of desire for meaning (...) what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses (Kristeva 1982:2).

It is what I exclude in order to become myself that returns to me as abject, and keeps threatening me from its place of banishment. And while this forbidden abject tugs at me and fascinates desire, I simultaneously feel nausea and repulsion - a reaction that protects me. My demarcation of a space where I reside with my objects and representations is then haunted at its edges by the elusive return of a “primal”

repression that has taken place prior to the emergence of an ego: “The abject is that pseudo-object that is made up before but appears only within the gaps of secondary repression. *“The abject would thus be the “object” of primal repression”* (Kristeva 1982:12). It is what I separate from that, having been the mother, will turn into an abject (Kristeva 1982:13). It is the conscious experience of being without border... of not yet being “me.”

In experiencing abjection, a sudden darkness floods me, and I stray in a night where the outline of the signified thing vanishes. Or, rather, “I” do not stray, “I” am estranged from myself, beside myself, outcast. Abjection is ambiguous. One feels both fascination and horror, repulsion. In abjection, I am neither subject nor object, but borderline - haunted by a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant inside or outside. The borders and barriers that “I” have erected tremble, recede into the night, suddenly become fragile and uncertain. The possibility of becoming something terrible, something which is not me and which somehow invades me from the inside as well as from the outside – this is horror.

The experience of abjection signals a failure in the paternal function to unwaveringly sustain the symbolic order and its subject. Perhaps this is a “father, existing but unsettled, loving but unsteady” (Kristeva 1982:6). What is revealed in abjection is precisely the frailty of the symbolic, which is also why any crime, in drawing attention to the fragility of the law, is abject (Kristeva 1982:4). Let me simply note for

now that this weakening of the symbolic occurs not only in abjection but also, according to Kristeva, in *melancholia*, where the melancholic bears witness to the frailty of the paternal function and is devoted to the lost mother (Kristeva 1989).

In both abjection and melancholia, the primordial loss of the maternal body seems to have been unsufficiently or unsatisfactorily recompensated through language, and in both cases the “symptom” of such a paternal failure is a certain poeticisation of language, an overemphasis on the semiotic. In abjection, language gives up, somehow becoming unfamiliar and strange to me like that structure within my body, the monster, the nonassimilable alien (Kristeva 1982:11) ... A darkness descends on my words and renders them opaque, dense and loudly ringing. This estrangement of language, its sudden musicality and rhythm, is literary in tone.

This is a night “without images, buffeted by black sounds” (Kristeva 1982:207). Like the night where Lucy hears the maids stumble through the hallway on naked feet, where she is half crushed by her mother’s dead body. Writing frantically on a crumpled piece of paper, she describes the sounds that throng her on every side, while the gaseous formations in her room slowly solidify into a pair of piercing eyes. It seems as if, with the approach of darkness, my attempt to see the non-object that crushes me is revealed to be a visual hallucination (Kristeva 1982:46) covering a failure of the gaze. And yet the writer who is straying in this night cannot stop being a voyeur. “Voyeurism accompanies the writing of abjection” (Kristeva 1982:46). Eyes

wide shut, staring blindly.

The aesthetic task, Kristeva writes, is precisely to explore the limits of the speaking being and the foundations of the symbolic construct (Kristeva 1982:18). With her discussion of abjection, she has revealed the very mechanism of subjectivity (which she believes to be universal) upon which horror is based and which, in her view, is the obsessive locus of poetic writing (Kristeva 1982:208).

By suggesting that literature is its privileged signifier, I wish to point out that, far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the coding of our crisis, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses. Hence its nocturnal power, “the great darkness” (...) (Kristeva 1982:208).

# Kiss

We have to work on the first and most primitive pleasure, that is to say, on orality.  
- Helene Cixous, *Readings*

Let us stick with desire and horror, the object of horror. In order to look into the nature of horror, Kristeva discusses the case of little Hans and his fear of horses. For my purposes, I will note that she identifies Hans' fear with the fear of something unnameable for which the horse has become a metaphor, and that Hans' fear of horses is later replaced with a violent loathing for raspberry syrup, which, as Kristeva points out, is the colour of blood. The phobic object, in Hans' case the horse/syrup, is thus seen by Kristeva as a compressed metaphor for the unrepresentable, repulsive and abject. The colour of the syrup evokes the edges of a gash (Kristeva 1982:36), in other words it is as if it points towards something that has been cut away and is lacking, absent. According to Kristeva, the phobic object absorbs all more archaic and unnameable fears and thus reveals a "*drive economy in want of an object*" (Kristeva 1982:35). It becomes metaphoric of this lacking "object," covering its absence by occupying its place.

"Metaphor of want as such, phobia bears the mark of the frailty of the subject's signifying system" (Kristeva 1982:35). Metaphor of want... in the sense of a lack, most certainly, and a freudian reading detects in Hans' fear the fear of castration and a preoccupation with something lacking in his mother's body, as if her sexual organs



have been subjected to a violent circumcision that left only a wound, a red ring. Yet also *want* in the sense of desire, a drive economy that cannot find its object, a desire directed towards an absent place, that seems to find no object that could slake it.

Would Hans' fear of horses, then, perhaps be the fear of being bitten, thus "castrated," by the horse, a fear that seems to mingle with his loathing for raspberry syrup, precisely an edible substance, a food, as if what is revealed in this conglomerate horse/syrup is at the same time the fear of being devoured and the wish (and failure) to devour?

I am reminded here of the vampire's insatiable hunger, its incessant craving for blood. Is the figure of the vampire, perhaps, such a phobic object that Kristeva discusses, a compressed metaphor for what is horrible and frightful within the boundaries of the novel, obsessively returning in the text? The vampire can be seen as a metaphor for a lacking "object." Its face then becomes a death mask or *prosopopeia* concealing an absence, a radical lack. In other words, it functions as a phobic object, as fear of the unnameable is redirected and becomes fear of the vampire. The vampire seems to play out the instability of this function: its presence is elusive and fleeting, the different crypts or compartments that should contain it are often found to be empty; it is missing from the text. Involved in a textual play of presence and absence, the vampire points towards the empty space "covered" through phobia.

The vampire is precisely not an object that confirms the subject's position, but rather (an) *abject*, pointing towards the unnameable vortex preceding the phobic. As abject it inspires both fascination and fear, desire and repulsion. The vampire marks an excessive desire to devour that can find no satisfaction, a desire for blood that seems to reach no terminus. The figure of the vampire, then, *combines the lack (of an "object") with an excessive desire for what is lacking*: it becomes the metaphor of want as such.

#### PHOBIA AS EGO PROJECTION

According to Kristeva, phobia requires a logic of passivation on the part of the subject (Kristeva 1982:39), in other words the subject must be able to position itself in the place of the object. Phobia "*displaces by inverting the sign (the active becomes passive) before metaphorizing*. Only after such an inversion can the "horse" or the "dog" become the metaphor of my empty and incorporating mouth, which watches me, threatening, from the outside" (Kristeva 1982:40). Following this logic, *it seems to be my own aggression that returns to threaten me in the phobic object*.

The scene with Jonathan and the mirror takes on a new light... Only his own face is reflected, perhaps revealing the vampire to be a hallucination, an attempt to reject or abject certain elements he refuses to accept. Drinking the vampire's blood while it is feeding at her throat, Mina's experience is perhaps the most powerful example of the mirror-like and hallucinatory projection of the ego on which, according to Kristeva,

horror is based. Locked in a deadly embrace, it becomes impossible to distinguish between “victim” and “aggressor.”

The vampire feeds on what has been defined as “good,” “clean,” “proper.” Not only on the body of the women, who then become “infected” (Stoker 1993:411) and “unclean” (Stoker 1993:366), but on certain places or atmospheres: of worship of the Logos. It places its coffins in old chapels, for instance. “For it is not the least of its terrors that this evil thing is rooted deep in all good” (Stoker 1993:310), Van Helsing remarks. These are areas or identities that have been established precisely by defining a border which places what is unacceptable on the “outside.”

Those “inside” then experience the return of such rejected elements – desire, aggression – from this “outside.” In fact, the “invasion” of safe places - London, the home, the bedroom - is instigated by an invitation from the one who inhabits that place. “He may not enter anywhere at first, unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come; though afterwards he can come as he please” (Stoker 1993:308). It is actually Jonathan who purchases a house in London for the Count. Lucy and her mother open the window in her room, and Renfield invites Dracula to enter the lunatic asylum.

The I is thus itself at risk of becoming a vampire, craving blood. Blood as abject, as a condensation of opposing elements, that binds me to what is lacking, the wound I

have cut in my own flesh.

Blood marks this violent streak in me, the propensity for murder. And yet, to follow Kristeva, I place it on the mother's account, I refuse to accept that I am the one who is violent, I refuse to accept the truth about my relationship with her: the necessity of a certain matricide in order to enter the symbolic universe of signification, my life and death struggle with my mother where I tear myself away from her as if ripping my very flesh in the process. As Kristeva points out, I cannot bear this separation, and in a frenzy of despair I try to hang on to her by swallowing a part of her, her breast, gulping it down like milk to make it my own so I could keep her with me always, to compensate for the loss of her body. Because I cannot accept that I am the one who must in some sense kill my mother in order to be, I lay the burden on her; she is the aggressive one, the murderous one. This is in part, Kristeva claims, the origin of the image of the death-bearing mother (Kristeva 1989:26-27) and helps explain why the ambiguity of blood, both its vital and murderous connotations, is related to the maternal figure.

Repressed sexual drives return in the threatening shapes of both male and female vampires, and the men's own aggression or desire to "devour" the enemy is reflected back at them. Not recognising in the figure of the vampire their own excessive desire to devour, sexually or otherwise, the narrators of the novel write, speak, shout, whimper and curse, letting the pen take the place of the teeth, syringe or penetrating

organ.

The phobic object is, more precisely, the vampire's fanged mouth, and the mouth that opens wide to eat me, to pierce my skin with its white teeth, becomes by a strange twist my own empty and devouring mouth. The vampiric figure is an ambiguous crossroads where my fear of being bitten is revealed to be my desire to bite.

## PHOBIA AND SPEECH

Might the production of narrative, this *orality*, somehow be related to the threat of the vampire's mouth that recurs in the text? The red mouth with its sharp, white teeth – that as a phobic object displaces and inverts before metaphorising - has already been shown to be mine. The attempt to name the unnameable that the phobic metaphor represents seems to lead to a veritable outpouring of words, an endless production of discourse.

After having discussed the case of little Hans, Kristeva moves on to discuss the phobia of a little girl who is afraid of being eaten by a dog. What interests Kristeva is the dazzling language skills displayed by the child: "the more phobic Sandy got, the more she spoke" (Kristeva 1982:40). At the age of three and a half the child "talks a lot, has an extensive vocabulary, expresses herself with ease and enjoys repeating strange and difficult words" (Kristeva 1982:40). Already Kristeva has noted the in the case of little Hans his "stupendous verbal skill" (Kristeva 1982:34), a talkativeness

that seems related to his eagerness to name everything he encounters. In the cases of these phobic children, then, the words must somehow come to replace the unnameable lack or emptiness that is concealed in the phobic metaphor, the “object” that does not let itself be grasped: the abject “object,” the m/other that has in some sense been swallowed – and we have already seen that all of the phobic objects (horse/syrup and dog) relates to the fear of being devoured (being bitten by the horse/dog) that, following the logic of passivation, is shown to be the subject’s own desire to devour (eating the raspberry syrup):

Through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now on more than ever, I elaborate that want and the aggressivity that accompanies it, by *saying*. It turns out that, under the circumstances, oral activity, which produces the linguistic signifier, coincides with the theme of devouring, which the “dog” metaphor has a first claim on. But one is rightfully led to suppose that *any* verbalizing activity, whether or not it names a phobic object related to orality, is an attempt to introject the incorporated items. In that sense, verbalization has always been confronted with the “ab-ject” that the phobic object is. Language learning takes place as an attempt to appropriate an oral “object” that slips away and whose hallucination, necessarily deformed, threatens us from the outside (Kristeva 1982:41).

There is something disturbing about my attempt to devour this “object” that is revealed in phobia, a partial failure: not the failure to incorporate but rather the failure to introject what is incorporated:

The phobic object is a complex elaboration, already comprising logical and linguistic workings that *are* attempts at drive introjection outlining the failure to introject that which is incorporated. If incorporation marks out the way toward the

constitution of the object, phobia represents the failure of the concomitant drive introjection (Kristeva 1982:40).

In other words, I have swallowed what was lacking (“my mother”), but I have not managed to digest it and so make it an indistinguishable part of me. The result of such a failure is the emergence of a structure of alterity within the subject: a stranger resides in me, a “nonassimilable alien, a monster” (Kristeva 1982:11). I am as if possessed by an other that from now on threatens me not only from the outside, but also from the inside.

In my nocturnal encounter with the vampire, I discover that the horror is already inside me. After having drunk the vampire’s blood, in an attempt, perhaps, to devour him, Mina’s languid body reclines on the coach as she listens to the slow, droning sound of Van Helsing’s voice drawing out the absent presence of the vampire within her. With the paralyzed lucidity that follows hypnosis, which is not a putting to sleep, but which rather prevents sleep, she finds, inside of her very body, the night without rest, the blank space of the other night where nothingness becomes a dense, invading presence: the vampire inside the blackness of his coffin, the sound of water. Mina’s body is in a strange movement turning into the coffin wherein the vampire is confined, it is transformed into a crypt seemingly containing a horror.

Looking to Kristeva, it is as if an inversion of the maternal metaphor has occurred: the abject mother that I have devoured will from now on occupy me like a child in my

belly, I have become my mother's mother. And yet the abject is not a thing or object, but rather a disturbing force that threatens with my disappearance. The Thing inside me (which might be my mother, my child, *m/other*) is lacking. I have swallowed a nothingness, nothing is inside me, the void is in my belly: *I find myself to be an empty crypt, inhabited by no one.*

In opening her mouth to the bleeding wound in the vampire's chest, this is what Mina has swallowed: a dizzying absence. The gap that lodges itself in her mouth is what she desperately attempts to express, to fill with words: "(...) I must either suffocate or swallow some of the - Oh my God! my God! what have I done?" (Stoker 1993:371). Swallow some of the – what? The blood? Milk? Semen? The abject flow from the body's inside, she cannot even name it. And yet her rapidly expanding text seems to be one endless attempt to name, to describe the encounter with the vampire who is fading into the night. She records even the smallest detail, producing writing at a vertiginous speed. It is as if her diary must take the place of the vampire who is absent, that the nocturnal presence must show itself within the text, and every detail thus becomes part of that fetishistic screen simultaneously pointing towards and concealing the undead. When Mina writes how Lucy, sleepwalking, puts her head on the windowsill at night with "something that looked like a good-sized bird" (Stoker 1993:126) seated next to her, this piece of text has a hidden meaning that she is seemingly unaware of. She diligently records how the "pin-pricks" on Lucy's neck, that she believes she herself has made when pinning Lucy's shawl, become



increasingly frayed at the edges and refuse to grow (Stoker 1993:127), and yet she attaches no meaning to these signs. It is as if the invasive presence of the vampire looms in the shadow of the text, not quite emerging into its light, but hovering at its edges like a darkness that might suddenly flood it and empty the text of all meaning.

#### UNSETTLED FATHER

Mina's nightmarish experience of being invaded by an otherness which threatens her with the collapse of identity and meaning, is perhaps caused by a certain symbolic frailty, a failed attempt to separate. The paternal function, which should ensure the successful projection of drives onto corresponding objects and uphold the subject-object position in a satisfactory manner, is somehow not strong enough, and the "I" begins to stray. Kristeva finds this weakening of the symbolic not only in abjection, but also in melancholia. Here, as well, the ambiguous devotion to the lost "Thing" (Kristeva 1989:13) is caused by the weakness of a father "deprived of phallic power" (Kristeva 1989:45) or by the "denial of the father's function" (Kristeva 1989:45).

Following a Freudian analysis of mourning (Kristeva 1989:10), Kristeva basically interprets mourning as a process through which, though I grieve for the lost object, I reconcile myself with the loss. I mourn, I get over it, I move on. *She associates mourning with normal language acquisition*, where I find compensation for my loss in language itself: the word becomes a satisfactory substitute for the Thing (Kristeva 1989:41). I say "mother" because her body has been taken away from me, and the

word “mother” compensates for the lack of her body. Mourning thus operates within a certain economic “exchange” structure based upon loss and recompensation. There is also the sense of possession of the object; I can say “mother” whenever I like and thus in a sense control her now absent body. This is the symbolic level perfectly functioning. In the same manner as the sphere of the world - with a similar structure of correspondence between object and desire - in Levinas view protects us from the horror of anonymous being, the symbolic here assures meaning.

In order to mourn, I must successfully identify with the father and adhere to paternal law. Desire (for the Thing that is lacking) is then, according to this law, redirected towards (amatory) objects that correspond to that desire. In *Dracula*, it is Van Helsing who occupies the role of the good father who wishes to uphold the Law. He is not only a scientist, metaphysician and doctor, but also a solicitor, making his connection to the law explicit. He is clearly the leader of the “little band of men” (Stoker 1993:485) While the vampire strikes at the men through the women’s bodies, and the men’s own desire for them (“Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine” (Stoker 1993:394)), it becomes Van Helsing’s stern duty to control that desire and direct it towards its proper place. For instance, not only does he forcefully keep Arthur from kissing Lucy as she is dying, but when Arthur later gives in to temptation and opens his arms to the vampire Lucy, Van Helsing steps between them with his crucifix lifted, keeping them apart (Stoker 1993:272).

His work is basically that of keeping certain elements separate, dividing into good and evil, life and death, and destroying what does not respect these borders. The lines are drawn through the help of symbols. For instance, when Mina and Van Helsing approach castle Dracula, he draws a circle of protection around them: “I drew a ring so big for her comfort, around where Mina sat; and over the ring I passed some of the wafer, and I broke it fine so that all was well guarded” (Stoker 1993:470). The vampire women who materialise from the swirling mist are powerless to enter this “Holy circle” (Stoker 1993:472) which also confines Mina, so she cannot join them. “They could not approach me (...) nor Madam Mina whilst she remained within the ring, which she could not leave no more than they could enter” (Stoker 1993:472). Through the power of such symbols - the circle, the body of Christ - Mina is confined inside and the undead women kept outside a symbolic space.

Yet what is outside this border holds a dreadful fascination that affects even Van Helsing, and to resist it necessarily involves an internal struggle. When he at last enters the lair of Dracula to kill the vampires, he finds he can hardly do it. “Yes, I was moved – I, Van Helsing, with all my purpose and motive for hate (...) Certain it was that I was lapsing into sleep, the open-eyed sleep of one who yields to a sweet fascination” (Stoker 1993:475). He describes how the vampire, when he opens the tomb, is “so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and protect one of

hers, made my head whirl with new emotion” (Stoker 1993:476). Only a sense of duty and the wish to protect and prevent the death and suffering of his friends, give him the resolution to carry out this “terrible task” (Stoker 1993:476), this “butcher work” (Stoker 1993:477). When he returns to Mina, she cries out in pain that he has endured too much (Stoker 1993:477).

The Thing that caused such desire and hate is gone, even if the pain of killing it is almost too much to bear. The only consolation is that it now is restored to its “proper” place, and the soul that has been held captive within the awful shape is freed (Stoker 1993:477). A successful work of mourning has just taken place. Compensation for the loss, for the hard work of separating and “killing,” is provided by the symbolic sphere. Safety. Order. Rationality instead of madness. Light and sunshine during the day, and sound sleep at night.

#### SOMETHING LOST; LOVE?

In mourning, the paternal element asserts itself, and the I who adheres to its law is rewarded: whatever sacrifice is made for its sake is made good. In melancholia, however, the compensation given for my loss seems wholly inadequate. The Thing is lost with such violence that life has lost meaning, and I passionately hate It for being gone. The words that are given me seem to move across an abyss, a draining vacuum that empties them of meaning. The melancholic’s speech becomes a “repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody” (Kristeva 1989:33) circling around that empty space.

It becomes musical while at the same time breaking logical sequences and shattering concatenations (Kristeva 1989:33), as if resounding with strange echoes: hollow, *crypt-ic*. Poetic.

Such hollow echoes reverberate throughout the pages of the novel in its constant return to the gleaming wax rolls, the phonograph, the timbre of Seward's voice as he cannot stop mourning his lost love, melancholy lover that he is. After transcribing the phonographic records for him, Mina's eyes are flushed with tears: "That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart" (Stoker 1993:285). Seward's love is that dark creature occupying the crypt, the vampire moving like a knife-blade through the door of the tomb. She is no longer a woman to be held and discarded like any other, a wife to be mourned and then replaced; she is lost with such a violence that he must return to the tomb in the impossible attempt to see her in its darkness, prying open the lead lid on her empty coffin with hands shaking in dread and anticipation.

The unbearable, endless night, wherein the disappointed lover's body twists in an agony which is not purely physical, but stills feels like the heart has been torn from the body... *It* is lost, and it feels like a part of myself has been lost, as if a part of my own body has been cut out and is missing. There is no exit from this misery, and no one can help me with the pain. "I am cursed, I am the most wretched being on earth." Or, as Dracula tells Jonathan in a strange moment of intimacy between the two:

I seek not gaiety nor mirth, not the bright voluptuousness of much sunshine and sparkling waters which please the young and gay. I am no longer young; and my heart, through weary years of mourning over the dead, is not attuned to mirth (Stoker 1993:36).

The novel is all about love: the men's romantic love for Lucy and Mina, Mina's self-effacing love for Jonathan, Van Helsing's paternal love for Arthur. The vampire's love... pressing its lips to its victim's throat in a passionate kiss; sucking the red blood, colour of love. When Dracula is confronted by the female vampires in his castle, who accusingly say: "You yourself never loved; you never love!" (Stoker 1993:55) he answers in a soft whisper, glancing at Jonathan's face : "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so?" (Stoker 1993:55) The influence of the wild rose placed on the coffin (Stoker 1993:421), the heart which must be cut out (Stoker 1993:213); such powerful symbols of a passion surviving beyond the grave.

This is also the point where love and horror are all tangled up, stuck together like two sides to a coin. The vampire's love is a horrible desire: to kiss, to kill. The draining desire to absorb the beloved, to incorporate him or her... a horrible love which perhaps calls upon the archaic fear of being suffocated by one's mother. One should not underestimate what links the vampire to the maternal: the ship which carries the coffins of earth into the West is called the Demeter.<sup>3</sup> Lucy is put in the tomb with her

---

<sup>3</sup> "Demeter" is the name of a Greek goddess, which can be translated as "earth mother" (Encyclopædia Britannica 1978:455)

mother. There is also Jonathan's descent to the cellar of the castle, where he stumbles down "a circular stairway, which went steeply down. (...) At the bottom there was a dark, tunnel-like passage, through which came a deathly, sickly odour, the odour of old earth newly turned" (Stoker 1993:66). As if the crypt containing the vampire is a womb of some kind – not a life-bearing one, but a deadly, suffocating place. Beyond the world or the unwavering law of the symbolic, desire and horror, it seems, can not be separated.

Just like phobia reveals the failure to introject what has been incorporated, melancholia can be seen as a digestory problem: I am not able to "devour" or "absorb" the desired object to satisfy my own needs, my hunger. Instead I hunger for something else, that is lost. Neither "I" nor "object" are valid in this place: we are approaching the crypt. The melancholic problem has to do with both the object - which is not the desired "Thing" but rather its substitute - and the self - which is not able to project its desire for the Thing onto the object in a proper way (Kristeva 1989:14).

The failed attempts to devour somehow refer to another kind of orality; a violent retching, expulsion through the mouth: abjection. The constellation melancholia - abjection in Kristeva's writings seems to be centred around the mouth and the dynamic oscillation between expulsion and incorporation: kissing, eating, vomiting, speaking.

## Crypt

A crypt: a body without a heart, occupied by the dead or missing Thing; an empty coffin, an old chapel or tomb to which the Undead returns. Some place that fills and empties, a body that absorbs and vomits, rejects.

The oscillation between expulsion and introjection that - as we have seen in Kristeva's discussion of the phobic object - reveals the basic structure of the speaking subject, is a dynamic process reminiscent of the da-fort game of the child discussed by Freud (Freud 1940), where the mother is expelled and then retrieved. This game relies on movement, certainly: the flick of the wrist, spinning the spool of thread back and forth, but also - and more important - are the *sounds* that the child makes. Taking shape through a similar play, the crypt becomes a pulsating space situated at the border of the speaking subject.

It is no coincidence that the freudian da-fort game is one of expelling and retrieving the *mother*. The child's effort to control the mother's movements is also an attempt to lessen the pain of separation, an effort to establish a sense of power over her movements, her presence and absence. There is a certain pleasure in playing the game and in the control it should establish. Yet it is as if the child's game, instead of successfully leading to a sense of control, keeps reminding it of the pain of separation, of the one that is lacking, and its own powerlessness. The words *da, fort* lose their



meaning as I suddenly understand that I am alone with only a piece of string in my hand; my mother is not there. My words sound unpersuasive, unrelated to her presence or absence. The game is meaningless, simply the utterance of sounds loudly ringing through an empty space. And yet the child cannot stop making these sounds.

A process played out in the body, through the mouth and stomach: the attempt to incorporate, to swallow and digest followed by expulsion, a violent retching: *Da, fort*. On the one hand: desire, hunger, the wish to devour and digest. On the other: Nausea, abjection, a process of differentiation. The cryptic patterns originate within the body itself. I open my mouth to speak, and the same process takes place. "The clean and proper body," which is also the identity of a subject, establishes itself in opposition to what is "not me." These elements (body/semiosis and symbolic) are always intertwined and cannot be understood independently of each other. Thus, the dialectic, and always complex, interplay between semiotic and symbolic seems to run together with bodily processes of filling and emptying, incorporating and rejecting; processes of separating and becoming, which, however, always leaves one lacking. A throbbing emptiness within the self: understood as *a symbolic construction*, understood as *a body*.

Something is missing: within the text, within the body. My mother is missing when I play with words, rubbing a piece of string between my fingers, just like the vampire, this object of narrative desire, is more often than not missing from the text which

obsessively return to it, like a string of words approaching and withdrawing from an empty crypt. This string of words spirals around the emptiness left in the vampire's wake: tracing the shipment of coffins, the official documents, examining Lucy's sick body and the wounds on the children's throats. The metonymical figures that here take the place of the vampire - ie the punctures on the throat - become entwined with the medical work of the physicians Seward and Van Helsing, who attempt to establish a correct diagnosis based on a few erratic symptoms. Just like the reader's interpretative work, their profession is now that of interpreting metonomies and metaphors in a body of text.

The physicians attempt to read a body, and their work - like Jonathan's diary from the East - becomes the process of slowly mapping an unknown topography: Lucy's suddenly changed and foreign anatomy, the movement of her blood through a network that should be closed but is, inexplicably, open. Her body itself becomes, perhaps, some sort of crypt: a dark place filled and emptied, marked by almost illegible, cryptic signs. It signals a disturbance, a lack, and the return of something that should not exist. Desire for some Thing which is not her husband. Horror and repulsion of the same Thing, the attempt to keep It separate. The men's reactions reproduce this pattern exactly: desire for some Thing, which is not Lucy, simultaneous horror and repulsion. The overwhelming physical reactions that accompany these drives seem connected to the compulsion to write; to describe the details of the changing face, the beautiful shape which has suddenly become intensely

erotic: the dead body, the death mask of the face. Desire is pulled towards and pushed away from this place, where meaning collapses.

We begin to understand, perhaps, why the feminine body seems to be connected to that cathexis of elements that cannot “be seen,” but must hide behind a mask.

As Kristeva points out, one should not be surprised to find death’s space located within the body itself. For Kristeva, this is precisely why menstrual blood, pus-filled wounds and excrement are filthy: what is revealed by such abject matters is *death already at work within the body* (Kristeva 1982:3). Rather than being an exterior force that threatens the vital body from without, such bodily processes reveal that the border between life and death is not the clean border that seems to separate my body from everything else - for instance, the skin - but runs instead like a hidden seam through the body itself: the body is in such a view a crossroads where both vital and disintegrating forces are simultaneously present. As we have seen, these elements are, in Kristeva’s view, all brought together in the maternal body.

Puncturing the skin, disrespecting borders: the vampire “infects” the body at the same time as identity and symbolic law are disrupted, and demonstrates the fragility of such borders: what separates my body from waste, and myself from the horror of what is unthinkable; of no longer being “I.” Death. “Emptiness,” a radical lack: signifier without any signified. The corpse is the utmost of abjection, the border that has encroached itself upon everything: “(...) my the entire body falls beyond the limit -

cadaver, *cadere*” (Kristeva 1982:3). Here, what is ejected from the body is no longer refuse, but the I itself.

Trying to block out the sound of fearful hearts beating, speech and culture become the hysterical outpouring of words and meaning that attempt to mask the emptiness upon which the subject is skilfully poised, like an artist balancing across a yawning abyss. An emptiness which not only approaches from the outside, but is already present within the body, which, having been born, will surely die.

## *Dracula: A second reading*

Exploring the crypt, we have been drawn into a rhythmical motion, an almost musical oscillation between introjection and rejection. What we have discovered to be an essentially oral process centred not only around the inner organs, but first and foremost around a mouth: the fanged mouth of the vampire, perhaps. Also in discussing the kiss, the vampire's mouth has been our central object of fascination, leading us towards a language that speaks for the swallowed object; the cryptic language of literature.

Eating, kissing and speaking: these are all phenomena that have to do with desire. The desiring subject who eats and speaks is, following the trajectory in Levinas' *Existence and Existents*, always situated in a world and in a relation to objects in it. In desiring these objects, one is absorbed in the world. This absorption is for Levinas a positive condition that simply denotes the structure of consciousness. Yet in rare situations a sudden darkening or receding of the world begins to take place, in which case we are no longer able to speak of experience or a subject who experiences. This darkening or retreat from the world can according to Levinas be found in art or, perhaps, in a certain language, attentive to the silence seeping in through its interstices and seams. No matter how it takes place, what is at stake here is a sense of rupture, where the positioning of both subject and object is put into question. It is like the despairing desire of a kiss, where lovers open their mouths to each other, helplessly

attempting to devour...

Let us stay focused on the mouth, Dracula's mouth with the protruding teeth. On his breath, still smelling of blood. It is remarkable how often the writer's interest is focused on describing this mouth, its plump redness and the sharp, white teeth which are simultaneously sensual and unpleasant to behold. Being thus described repetitively in the text, the mouth comes to serve a metonymical function. The moist, opening mouth becomes the centre where a network of threads run together like strings of saliva: kissing, biting and bleeding... horror and fascinated desire.

Sensing the vampire's breath on one's skin is simultaneously erotic and horrible, alluring and repulsive. We have already commented on what might underlie such an ambiguity in discussing Kristeva's understanding of the universal relation to the maternal "abject," which is of course an oral relation. Also we have discussed the mouth as a phobic object and a projection of the self which fears it.

The symbolic barriers that protect law and order are of course disturbed by what comes from "outside" and, according to the somewhat myopic logic of the ego mechanism, only a violent act of suppression or clinging to what is perceived to be "inside" can restore these boundaries. The novel ends quite ironically with the successful slaying of the vampire. The denial (of "inner" aggression) which turns into fear (of "outside" aggression) is expressed in a violent act, which only betrays and

strengthens what was denied. The horror or anxiety which in fact confronts the narrators with rejected or repressed elements, is channeled into fear towards a recognizable (phobic) object, which is then “removed.” The fragile balance of the symbolic construct is thus momentarily restored. The foreign element is removed from the West, and writing ends.

### A CULTURAL PROJECTION?

Written at the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Stoker’s *Dracula* is also an expression of a certain *fin-de-siecle* atmosphere. Viewing the vampire as a projection of the self which fears it – in this case perhaps its contemporary audience - the reader finds a whole variety of cultural anxieties compressed in the vampire metaphor: the fear of immigration, especially from Eastern Europe, which is anti-semitic in tone. When Jonathan first observes Dracula in London he looks like a Jew: “a tall, thin man, with a beaky nose and black moustache and pointed beard” (Stoker 1993:222/223). The reader detects homophobia, the fear of female sexuality, the uneasy feeling about equality between the sexes and the uprooting of feminine submission. Mina herself makes fun of the “New Woman” (Stoker 1993:118/119) and is only able to assist the men due to her own “man’s brain” (Stoker 1993:302).

A popular thinker of his time, read by f.ex. Freud, Hitler, Musil and Joyce, Otto Weininger published his book *Sex and Character* in 1903. Weininger’s theory is that humans are a combination of two plasmas or elements: one, ““Arrhenoplasm” (male

plasm)” (Weininger 2003:16), is the law-abiding, intellectual, rational, artistic, creative and moral element. The other plasma, called ““Thelyplasm” (female plasm)” (Weininger 2003:16), contains the irrational, criminal, non-moral, primitive (sexual) impulses. Thelyplasm seems to be mostly a negative element which lacks the positive qualities inherent in Arrhenoplasm, for instance, it lacks consciousness, conception of the individual or of personal property, and is artistically only capable of imitation. While both men and women are a mix of the two plasms, and there exists no “absolute” male or female except as Platonic ideas, Arrhenoplasm is according to Weininger dominant in Aryan men of a certain class and culture. Thelyplasm, on the other hand, is dominant in women, in barbaric, uncivilized men, criminals and lunatics, inferior races like “negroes and Mongolians” (Weininger 2003:303), and especially in Jews.

Weininger’s book had a wide-ranging influence in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and expressed popular thoughts at the time. Such a dual perception of reality is clearly present in Stoker’s novel, as is the fear that these distinctions should fade, and the barriers that keep such “opposing” elements apart, fail. There is an obvious issue with gender at stake here, where the male protagonists come to represent the rational self, the acting subject, and the female body becomes a symbol of the unconscious (dreaming/sleepwalking), erotic and destructive forces opposed to this principle. This primordial “Battle of the Sexes” (Dijkstra 1988:5) is a typical theme in *fin-de-siecle* art.



The novel portrays a cultural struggle for identity at a time when this identity is perceived to be threatened; from the “outside” by the foreign blood of immigrants from Eastern Europe, and from within, where new ideas and lifestyles begin to emerge. *Dracula* holds a mirror to *fin-de-siecle* England and shows its true face: what it wants to be, and what it fears.

#### BREAKING THE VESSEL

As we have seen, horror signals a disturbance in identity, and a disruption of barriers around an area that has been previously defined (or confined) through a process of separation. Horror seems to reveal a failure to uphold the dualistic thought-patterns that such a differentiating process initiates. In *Dracula*, the polar oppositions that have been established begin to collapse as the foreign (“East”) invades the home not only from outside, but from within the “infected” body itself.

The barrier that “separates”: the thin layer of skin that protects one’s body from its environment. Or a boundary that appears solid, but is in fact fragile and transparent, like Lucy’s window with the glass violently smashed. A wolf sticks its head through this opening, and what could previously be seen through the glass, safely on the outside, now enters the home. Something wild which has broken from its cage in the zoo, where it has been stared at from a safe distance. At the same time, Lucy is, perhaps, herself turning wild and breaking from some sort of cage. The body, the

home, “inside,” “purity” – what has been perceived as a closed area is shown to be open, already connected to what returns.

Good and evil; polar oppositions that must be kept apart carefully. We have seen how the vampire is sometimes described in almost religious terms, a strangely inverted Christ. Like a perversion of the Messiah, who blesses his disciples with eternal life in Paradise, the Count curses his victims with undeath, which nails them to their bodies, to existence. During what Van Helsing calls “the Vampire’s baptism of blood” (Stoker 1993:414), like the Christ, he offers his own flesh and blood for the other to eat. The Vampire’s baptism is in fact like *the communion*, where drinking the blood and eating the flesh promises identification with the one consumed. When Mina opens her mouth to the bleeding wound, the triangular constellation of subject, object and experience - (entities which, as we have seen, have been painfully torn apart through our separation from the mother and integration into the symbolic sphere of the father) - somehow melts together. At the same time the most horrible and most fascinating event, the subject's experienced separation is proven to be illusory and is broken with the breaking of the skin. Blood now runs through the two bodies (Dracula's and Mina's) as if through a single network, and through the encounter with the other, who is not an object, a powerful transformation is taking place.

The experience of horror delineates the problem of perceiving the body as a self-contained entity with clearly marked borders. It is already in a relation to what is seen

as separate.

### “CHIASM”

Exploring the advent of subjectivity, on one level we have found the relation between subject and objects, which correspond to each other in a symbolic space or in the circuit of a consciousness which involves what Levinas will call “world.” On another level, there is a body, already directed towards an “outside” in a pre-objective relation, as Kristeva has shown us. Here, “subject” and “object” has no meaning – not yet.

The world is a structure of consciousness, claims Levinas. While that might be, at least partially, true, what Kristeva has taught us is that such a symbolic construct is in its own turn structured by bodily drives. There is thus necessarily an intimate and complex relation between body and world. Just as certain symbolic structures might seem to imitate bodily patterns like abjection and anality, are not these drives themselves interpreted in light of the symbolic sphere? In other words, the relationship between a body and the world must be seen as a circular, dynamic and repetitive process.

The body seems to be a process: the absorption, incorporation, transformation and rejection of what is “outside.” Not only objects or others, but filth, death, for instance. It becomes the point where a dynamic movement between subjectivity and anonymity

plays itself out, and vital and disintegrating forces beyond the subject's control are simultaneously present. In the density of the body, the seemingly illuminated surface of the world curdles to an opaque point. Here, "I" can not control myself, "I" am already something other: a body, which can not be an object to me, and which is always already related to its own "outside."

To return to the novel: in drinking each others blood, a special bond is established between Mina and Dracula. Somehow they become part of each other. Hereafter, the red scars on their foreheads will mirror each other: Dracula's scar caused by Jonathan's shovel (Stoker 1993:71), the mark which appears when Van Helsing puts the Host on Mina's brow (Stoker 1993:381). We remember Levinas' definition of the world and the difference between eating and kissing he discusses; eating as the correspondence between the object and the subject's desire, kissing as a confrontation with an otherness that upsets this correspondence. What becomes apparent in the Vampire's baptism is the impossibility of separating eating from kissing. While I might think I am only eating, a process which is beyond my control is taking place within my body: absorption, rejection and *transformation - of the object, but also of my self*. The borders that separate subject and object blur.

To be a being is to be radically dependent on one's surroundings. It is to be always changing, just like the world one inhabits is constantly transforming itself in a myriad of ways. While I am absorbed in the world and changed by it, I am also absorbing the

world and changing it. When I let the air out, it has been transformed by my body. The same process takes place in eating. When I eat, the “object” – the meal - becomes part of me. Eating a meal, I am not only sating my hunger with an object that corresponds to my desire, I am also on one level absorbing something which can not be an object to me, something other which transforms me, however imperceptibly. The mystery of the Vampire’s baptism in such a view reveals the basic mode of the being of a body in the world. “I” can never be separate, not really. “I” can not fully control my relation to the world or distance myself from what approaches.

For instance, the characters bodily responses to the vampire are not reactions they can control. What is at stake here is not only a feeling of horror and/or desire. The intensity of these physical reactions is paramount to violent transformations. I am thinking here not only of the dramatic physical changes in Lucy’s body: the tightening of the skin, the emasculation of her body, the lengthening teeth and shrinking lips. Jonathan, for example, ages far beyond what is normal for a man of his years as his hair turns white overnight. Also Mina’s body is affected, her physical needs for food and sleep are diminished and her skin responds to the holy wafer with a violent allergic reaction.

Looking to a thinker like Merleau-Ponty and his investigation into the phenomenology of perception, our consciousness is always a *bodily* consciousness which is structured through our sensory exchanges with the “outside” world. For

Merleau-Ponty, the human body has, or rather *is*, a pre-objective relation to the world it inhabits. What he discovers is the perceptual field which opens to the perceiving body, a field which contains many layers of meaning. The first, primordial sediment consists of pre-objective phenomena, on the verge of “becoming,” which the human body opens towards. The body and its environment are thus involved in an inner relation or structure, where they mutually refer to each other. To perceive phenomena as “objects” involves a shift in our mode of consciousness, from pre-reflective to reflective. Phenomena then become something separate, other – which the body is facing as objects.

For Merleau-Ponty, sensing involves an ambiguous process of “identity and difference” (Merleau-Ponty 1999:234).<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, it inserts a distance between myself and things, precisely because I possess this ability. It separates me from things and lets them “congeal” into objects. On the other hand, however, this ability must be seen as a universal phenomenon and not some “private enterprise” (Merleau-Ponty 1999:235). There is sensing in the world. And the human body is the location or event through which this universal phenomenon expresses itself. In this view, sensing is “the return of the visible to itself” (Merleau-Ponty 1999:234) and the relation between the body and things is characterised by a “reversibility” (Merleau-Ponty 1999:249) where, through my senses, things are not only around me but “inside” me – inside my gaze, my hands.

To describe this “reversible” relation between the sensing body and the sensed things Merleau-Ponty uses the rhetoric term *chiasm*. The chiasm expresses the inner relation and unclear boundaries between myself and the other, and how one is always in an open, communicative situation.

Language is directed towards the world in a similar way: it opens towards the world at the same time as it strives to comprehend it, and involves not only the expression of a self but communication with others: “It all happens as if the intention of the other takes possession of my body, or as if my intentions take possession of his” (Merleau-Ponty 1994:152).<sup>5</sup> I and the other are indeed never separate, when even the discourse that would establish me as “separate” invades me like an other, from outside.

## RESISTANCE AND PSYCHOSIS

Confronting the vampire, confronting horror, one’s first reaction is disbelief. Such otherness, one thinks, cannot exist. This doubt, however, only makes one vulnerable as it keeps one from doing the hard work that needs to be done. Van Helsing at one point chides Seward for his refusal to believe in vampires:

---

<sup>4</sup> All quotes from Merleau-Ponty 1999 are my translation.

<sup>5</sup> My translation.

You are a clever man, friend John; you reason well, and your wit is bold; but you are too prejudiced. You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you. Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are; that some people see things that others cannot? (...) Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain (Stoker 1993:246).

He then mentions examples of other unbelievable phenomena, like astral bodies, thought-reading etc. (Stoker 1993:247) Van Helsing possesses the insight that phenomena that fall outside our daily life do exist. Yet his insight cannot lead to any opening towards the foreign elements that disturb the order of things, but rather to the effort to resist. Any alternatives to this resistance are, in the novel, psychotic ones: Renfield is a “homicidal maniac” (Stoker 1993:95), and Lucy starts to eat children.

In Kristeva’s investigation of subjectivity, the structure of psychosis seems to become a universal feature of the subject. I am already directed towards what is “outside,” as if it resides in me... like an other within the self, an indigestible, troubling element that can neither be found nor erased. The fragile balance within the self is, it appears, not something fixed, but rather a condition one constantly exerts oneself to uphold.

The experiences of melancholia and especially of horror in Kristeva’s works reveal a process which will never reach its “goal;” a body, an identity which is constantly striving to erect its borders, and which is always already directed towards its own outside through *want* (desire or lack). The kristevan subject is always in a process of becoming, and under a certain pressure; the threat of symbolic failure.



## THE WRITING OF HORROR

Around the vampire, spaces seem to open where the normal rules are put out of play: Lucy's bedroom, the Castle, the crypt, the punctures on Lucy's throat. These are explored in the novel and are as such literary spaces that inspire writing and fascinate the reader and the protagonists alike. These are also spaces within a body, the body of Lucy, filling and emptying, the body of *Dracula*, this network of text.

The novel follows a circular rhythm that is punctured, a closed circuit that is suddenly opened: from the foreign, to the home and back to the unknown. A mouth that opens and closes, incessantly speaking. A heart that beats and pauses, loving and fearing.

As the narrators finally open the coffin they have been searching for, they find only a "waxen image" covering a nothingness... even this last box, then, is just another empty compartment, like the many crypts that have already been opened. While the narrators watch, what they have been searching for crumbles to dust. "It" disappears, as if it has never existed. In being "discovered" at last, the unrepresentable locus of the text collapses in on itself and withdraws from sight. "It" cannot bear such close scrutiny: looking directly, there is nothing to see.

What remains at the end of the novel after the vampire has disappeared, in addition to "a mass of type-writing" (Stoker 1993:486), is Mina's and Jonathan's child. The boy, though usually called Quincey, is named after all the men (Stoker 1993:485): a sign of

the Law, which has successfully reproduced itself. In giving birth to this child, Mina's body, which is no longer under the influence of threatening forces, now functions as an instrument in service of the Law. The red scar on her forehead, which marked her as "unclean," a warning of the danger she represented, is gone without a trace. Van Helsing's project has been a success. All signs of the vampire, also that dangerous mark on the feminine body, have been erased. Even Lucy has been replaced:

In the summer of this year we made a journey to Transylvania, and went over the old ground which was, and is, to us so full of vivid and terrible memories. It was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths. Every trace of what had been was blotted out. The castle stood as before, reared high above a waste of desolation.

When we got home we got to talking of the old time – which we could all look back on without despair, for Godalming and Seward are both happily married (Stoker 1993:486).

The novel records a crisis, a violent disturbance. It verges on the collapse of boundaries, between East and West, inside and outside, myself and the other. No matter how we approach it, the experience of horror seems connected to the delineation of borders that define the foundation of discourse, of meaning and identity. Negotiating these boundaries, the narrators feel forced to record their experiences, to write neurotically. The pen itself becomes a border or line which operates on the limit between sense and non-sense, vision and hallucination, "sanity" and psychosis.

When the threat of collapse has been averted and the disturbance fully removed from

the narrator's world, there is also an end to literary writing: the novel, which was inspired by the fascinated dread of the vampire's victims, now comes to an end.

That vortex of ambiguous drives, the unrepresentable space that opens behind the vampire metaphor and is at the centre of the novel, can not itself be described or recorded. Like Dracula's tomb, an impressive monument that contains nothing but a central vacuum or emptiness, *Dracula* becomes a gesture pointing towards its own "outside:" the emptiness that hides behind the death mask of the face, that dangerous and fascinating area which simultaneously inspires literary writing and evades any representation.

## LITERATURE

Critchley, Simon 1997: *Very Little... Almost Nothing. Death, Philosophy, Literature*, London.

Dijkstra, Bram 1988: *Idols of Perversity*, New York.

*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1978, Chicago.

Freud, Sigmund 1940: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips; Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse; Das Ich und das Es*.

Kristeva, Julia 1989: (transl. Leon S. Roudiez) *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia*, New York.

Kristeva, Julia 1982: (transl. Leon S. Roudiez) *Powers of Horror*, New York.

Kristeva, Julia 1984: (transl. Margaret Waller) *Revolutions in Poetic Language*, New York.

Levinas, Emmanuel 1988: (transl. Alphonso Lingis) *Existence and Existents*, Pittsburgh.

Macdonald, A. E. (ed.) 1977: *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Edinburgh.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 1994: (transl. Bjørn Nake) *Kroppens fenomenologi*, Oslo.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 1999: (transl. Per Aage Brandt) *Om sprogets fænomenologi*,  
København.

Stoker, Bram 1993: *Dracula*, Penguin Books, London.

Weininger, Otto 2003: *Sex and Character*, New York.